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# Not Without Dust and Heat

BY

WESTON MARTYR

*Author of "The Perfect Ship"*

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"I cannot praise a ~~fugitive and cloistered virtue~~, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat."—MILTON.

NEW YORK MCMXXX
IVES WASHBURN · PUBLISHER

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC., BINGHAMTON, N. Y.

TO

MY WIFE

NORAH CHRISTINE MARTYR

WHO

KEPT THE POT BOILING

WHILE

I LABORED AT THIS LITTLE WORK

## NOTE

Nine of these stories have appeared in "Blackwood's Magazine"; two have been published in "Yachting" and one, "Sailing Directions," appeared in "The Blue Peter." One story has not yet been printed in any magazine. I am not surprised.

W. M.

London, 1929.

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# NOT WITHOUT DUST AND HEAT

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# NOT WITHOUT DUST AND HEAT

## I

## A DRUG ON THE MARKET

Ferguson is a field collector. I think that is the technical name for him. He travels about all over the world collecting things for museums. It must be a most uncomfortable sort of life, but Ferguson assures me he likes it. I notice, however, that he always seems very glad to get home again, even though his "home" consists merely of the other room in my cottage, which lies hidden away in the forgotten corner of Sussex where I endeavor to supplement the earnings of my pen by cultivating mushrooms for the market. This peaceful and unexciting pursuit consists mainly of turning over vast quantities of manure with a pitch-fork, and I observe that nothing pleases Ferguson more than to sit for hours on end on a wheel-barrow, smoking and watching me work. The trip before last he went off looking for Fulmar petrels' eggs in something he called an Icelandic trawler. He returned with only two eggs and all his clothes smelling frightfully of fish; but all the same he seemed absurdly pleased with the result of his efforts. After that he rushed off to Borneo and Formosa, these places being apparently the principal centers of the dried human head industry, because, when he returned the other day, he

brought seventeen of these grisly articles with him. And what is more, he insisted on unpacking the things in my study-bed-kitchen-dining-room. It was while thus engaged that he told me his artless story; and it occurs to me, if only I can manage to write the yarn as Ferguson told it, perhaps I may find for once that plying my pen is a more productive form of employment than wielding my dung-fork.

"I had a hack at making my fortune this trip," said Ferguson, as he affectionately patted the head of a dark brown gentleman with a teethy grin and iridescent shell eyeballs. "It had nothing to do with these chaps, of course. These heads are a rush order from the State Museum at Chicago. They're what I went out to get, I know; but I hadn't been in Formosa long before I got myself involved in the camphor trade, and I'm afraid I rather neglected the museum johnnies' interests for a while. I did pretty well for them, though, in Borneo. I got hold of these five heads there, and they're all remarkably fine specimens. However, as soon as I got to Taihoku, I saw I was going to have trouble with my collecting. I'd never been in Formosa before, funnily enough, and I had no idea until I got there what a mess the Japanese have made of the place. I mean, from the point of view of a scientific collector. Formosa belongs to the Japs now. It was ceded to them at the end of their war with China, so I suppose they're entitled to do what they like with it. But I can't forgive them for changing the name of the place. They call it Taiwan. Just think of scrapping such a beautiful word as Formosa! And that's not all they've done. They've built a railway from one end of the island to the other; covered the whole place with sugar refineries and tea plantations, and changed Taihoku from a really interesting Chinese old walled town into an

ugly modern city with all the usual evidences of civilization sticking right out of it. Steel-framed buildings, I mean, and lamp-posts, motor-cars, traffic policemen, movie palaces, and all. It's a crime. It wasn't at all the sort of place I'd expected to find, and I thought at first the information I'd got from the museum people was all wrong or out of date or something. According to them Formosa was one of the few places left where I'd find the natives living their aboriginal lives absolutely untouched and uninfluenced by civilization, so it was a bit of a shock to me when I found Taihoku simply crawling with tourists, and it looked to me as if I'd better not waste my time there. Just about then, though, I met a man called Parmiter, who'd been living in the island for years, and he told me I needn't worry about my head-hunters, because there were still lots of them left —in spite of appearances.

"You see, Formosa's a big island. It's about two hundred fifty miles long by a hundred wide, and there's a backbone of high mountains running right down the middle of it, with a broad belt of coastal plain all round. The plain's the place where the railway and the sugar refineries and the policemen and so on function. It's all chock-a-block with modern improvements; and the Japs and Chinese cultivate every inch of it, from the high-tide line on the beaches right up to the first trees that mark the beginning of the forest and the hills. But there, at the foot of those trees, all signs of cultivation cease abruptly. It's queer. It's as if a dead line were drawn there. And it really is a dead line, too, because if you cross it and try to get over the mountains and into the forest, the odds are you'll never get back again. The Chinhwan attend to that."

"The Chinhwan!" said I. "Who on earth's that?"

"Green savages," replied Ferguson. "That's the name the

Japs give them. They're really the aboriginal Formosans. But they're savage right enough. They're the head-hunters, and the johnnies I wanted to do business with. But Parmiter said they didn't like strangers. According to him, they discouraged trespassers by cutting their heads off and smoking them and hanging them up as a warning in a tree. Those smoked heads make mighty effective notice boards, too. Parmiter took me to the Daitoteh Museum to see some. They were in a glass case with labels on 'em; but even they made me feel thoughtful. However, as I'd gone out there to collect heads, I thought I'd better have a shot at it, and I said as much to Parmiter. And he was horrified. He really was. He did his best to dissuade me. He said he'd been doing business in Formosa for twenty years, but he'd never heard of anybody getting into the interior, much less getting out again. He said the country in there was a mass of impassable mountains, real mountains running up to twelve and thirteen thousand feet, and all covered over with impenetrable forest. The mountains were steep, too, and the valleys weren't valleys at all, but just deep cracks full of swamp and fever—and Chinhwans. According to Parmiter, the climate was a sort of permanent Turkish-cum-shower bath, and the whole place was infested with avalanches owing to the steepness of the hillsides and the amount of rain which fell. Besides all this there weren't any paths in the forest, so if I ventured in I'd get lost, and Parmiter assured me that the savages would then come sifting up through the undergrowth and stick me full of poisoned darts with their blow-pipes, and then the only head to be collected would be mine.

"It was a cheery picture, but a bit exaggerated I thought. You see, I've heard that kind of thing before. They used to talk just like that about Upper Burmah and the Tidong-

Beru country, and all Africa, too, I expect, in the old days. And then some chap went in and had a look-see and found it was all rot. I'd heard precisely the same yarns about the Black River district in nineteen-two. I had to go up there to get some pheasants the Zoo people had set their hearts on, and the accounts I got of the country from the French in Hanoi nearly frightened me to death. On top of all the other horrors, the alleged savages there were supposed to be cannibals. They were, too; but all I can say is they never tried to eat me, and I hadn't been amongst them long before I found out they were gentlemen and sportsmen of the very first water. You had to handle them the right way, of course. I did. And they treated me like a brother. They got my pheasants for me, too, and I never had any trouble at all. In fact, when I left, the beggars stood round and wept. Yes, shed tears! So I wasn't overmuch impressed by Parmiter's awful warnings. And I suppose I must have shown it, because he really got quite concerned. It was then he told me about this camphor business. I imagine he brought the subject up on purpose to emphasize the danger and difficulty of getting up-country; but, if so, he made a mistake, because the things he told me were so interesting and suggestive that I got even keener on camphor collecting than I'd been on getting heads.

"You probably don't know it—I didn't till Parmiter told me,—but the only place in the whole world you can get camphor from is Formosa. The camphor-tree doesn't grow anywhere else, it seems. You can plant seeds or transplant seedlings elsewhere as much as you like, but it's no use. The Dutch have tried to introduce it into Celebes, and the Chinese had a shot at the business too, but it wouldn't work. It takes the tree two hundred years or so to reach maturity for one thing, and until then it doesn't yield

much camphor. And two hundred years is a long time to have to wait for your profits. Anyhow, if you want camphor, you've got to go to Formosa to get it. Even in Formosa the trees only grow right up in the mountains. They like the hot rains and the steamy mists and the Turkish bath climate, and they absolutely refuse to grow at all down in the plain.

"Parmiter was a camphor man. That's how he made his money. He bought concessions from the Japanese Government giving him the right to fell camphor-trees in certain areas of the forest. He worked the thing through Chinese contractors, whose job it was to cut down the trees, chop them up into small chips and shavings, which they then boiled in big stills, thus producing camphor oil and unrefined camphor. Parmiter used to pay them for the stuff at contract rates, refine it, and then ship it to London to be sold. He said he'd had as many as thirty contractors' gangs working for him at one time, and it used to pay him hand over fist. That was in the old days, when they were cutting the trees that grew on the edge of the forest near the plain. When they'd worked these out, though, and penetrated farther into the mountains, then their troubles with the savages began. The Chinhwan, naturally enough it seems to me, got annoyed at having their forest cut about by a lot of Chinamen; so they used to sneak up under cover and blow darts into Parmiter's men, who then swelled up and died. The result was that Parmiter found it mighty difficult to get enough men to carry on. He did what he could for a time, but the conditions got worse and worse, and he lost so many men at last that, when I was there, he only had one contractor working—a wily old Chinaman, who apparently still managed to sneak a tree or two out of the forest occasionally without getting too many of his men

hurt. Parmiter said it was a heart-rending position for him, because, of course, as soon as the supply of camphor diminished, the demand increased enormously, and the price of the stuff had risen to such fabulous heights that it made him weep to think of all the money he wasn't making. He said he'd offered his contractors ten times the ordinary rates to try and make them get some trees out for him, but even then they wouldn't risk it. And if experienced men like that wouldn't go into the forest at any price, how did *I* think I was going to get on there? That was Parmiter's argument. He elaborated it, too. I told you he was mightily concerned about me. He said, if it was humanly possible, the Japanese would obviously have settled in the mountains and exploited the camphor industry to its fullest extent. But they hadn't done it. There wasn't a single Jap in the interior, in spite of the fact that they had the greatest inducement imaginable to make them go there. I didn't quite grasp that, so I asked Parmiter to explain. And when he did he surprised me.

"It seems there's camphor in more things than moth-balls. In fact, according to Parmiter, civilization couldn't get along without the stuff. It appears it's the most important ingredient in the more potent forms of high explosive, for one thing. And also, if it weren't for camphor there wouldn't be any movie pictures. You couldn't manufacture the film. Parmiter said these were merely a few of the indispensable things which would be lost to the world if the supply of camphor were cut off. And the supply, he said, *was* pretty well cut off then. I said I thought it would be a pity about the moth-balls, but Parmiter wasn't joking. He was mighty serious. He said that the Japanese holding Formosa meant that they controlled the sole source of the world's supply of camphor. It gave them a monopoly of

something the rest of the world couldn't do without. At least, that's what it ought to mean; but the actual position was that the sole supply of a commodity which is indispensable to the civilized world was held in the hollow of the hands of a few Formosan aborigines. It sounded an unbelievable state of affairs, he said; but it was so.

"And it was, too! There's no mistake about it. Those Chinhwan really did seem to have got the rest of the world by the short hairs. What Parmiter told me interested me immensely, so I looked into the thing and made a lot of inquiries on my own. What I couldn't understand was, why didn't the Japanese Government, with such a tremendous prize as a camphor monopoly almost within their grasp, why didn't they turn to and wade into those Chinhwan and clean them up out of the way for good and all? And I found, by Jove! that they *had* tried—and failed! They'd gone after that camphor with both hands as soon as they got possession of the island. The cinema business was just getting going in those days, and the demand for camphor for film was growing by leaps and bounds. And the Japs apparently had gone leaping and bounding into that forest with intent to cut down camphor-trees as fast as they could lay ax to them. Of course, that was just like stirring up a wasp's nest with a pole. The Chinhwan didn't like it, and they stuck those Japs full of poisoned darts, and sent them leaping and bounding out of the forest again. This naturally didn't suit the Japanese. They're a proud and warlike people. Also the market was clamoring for camphor worse than ever, so the Government made up its mind to send an expedition into the interior and subdue the Chinhwan once and for all.

"The funny thing is I've never been able to find out actually what happened to that expedition. I believe they

sent the equivalent of a brigade of infantry into the forest with a lot of mountain guns. And I've heard that, by literally hacking their way through the trees and things, they managed to advance a few odd miles into the hills. Then they got stuck in a swamp in a valley, and the Chinhwans came drifting up as silent as shadows, and set to work with their blow-pipes. The yarn goes that not a single solitary soldier ever came out of that forest again. That's probably an exaggeration; but I do know the expedition was a most complete wash-out. The Japs stuck to it, of course. They sent a lot more troops into the interior from time to time; but the result was always the same. They didn't get in very far; they rarely even saw a savage; and the survivors always had the very devil of a job surviving and getting back. They even tried aeroplanes at last, and dropped a lot of bombs on those mountains and into the virgin forest. That was a fat lot of good, of course, so after a while they gave up trying to pacify the Chinhwan, as they called it.

"Meanwhile the price of camphor was soaring like a rocket, and the supply was reduced to a mere dribble trickling into a great ocean of demand. The situation was desperate. So were the Japs. They're tryers, are those little men; but in the end they gave up trying to subdue the aborigines, and tried another plan altogether. They set their troops to fencing off a suitable piece of forest with a good thick hedge of barbed wire. They'd start from the edge of the plain and run their wire in a semicircle around the area of forest selected, and then get to work cutting the camphor-trees in the part they'd inclosed. Like taking a bite out of the edge of the forest, you understand. The scheme was a good one, too. It was expensive, but it worked. They'd lose a lot of men putting their wire up,

and they had to keep troops on guard inside the fence all the time; but they are thorough little beggars, as I've said before, and they stuck to it. And when they'd cut all the trees on one place, they moved on and took another bite out of the woods. They even went to the length eventually of running an electric current through their wire, so that the Chinhwan got themselves electrocuted when they tried to crawl through it. All this, of course, made the production of camphor extremely costly; but the price of the stuff had risen to such an extent that it paid the Japanese fairly well.

"That was about the state of affairs when I arrived in the island, and I must admit I was intrigued. I was intrigued to such an extent, in fact, that I actually abandoned science for business, and deliberately enmeshed myself in trade! What do you think of that for a man who has had a strictly scientific training? It seems I only have to observe some filthy lucre waiting to be picked up, and off I rush, scrambling and sweating after the stuff like any venal peddling Levantine huckster-monger. It's deplorable! You see, it seemed so clear to me that it ought to be possible to get hold of all the camphor one wanted without much risk or a fraction of the expense involved in putting up electrified barbed-wire fences and all the rest of it, that I became fired with the idea of doing it and making a fortune for myself. The sole thing necessary was to gain the goodwill of the Chinhwan. Achieve that, and the felling of camphor-trees in Formosan forests would become as simple as culling mushrooms in the wilds of Sussex. At any rate, it seemed a sound and simple notion to me, and I determined to have a go at it.

"I can see you think it was a harebrained sort of thing to attempt; but you mustn't forget I've had quite a lot of

experience in dealing with assorted savages. I like them and I think I understand them, and they seem to like me, too. So I didn't regard those Chinhwan in the same light as Parmiter or the Japanese did. They looked on those savages as a lot of truculent bloodthirsty head-hunters, and they imagined the only way of dealing with such ugly customers was to shoot them at sight. Now I, on the other hand, thought it only reasonable to suppose that the Formosan aborigines, who derive from Malay stock, would not differ fundamentally from the Bornean Dyaks, and I had found the Dyaks to be a remarkably decent crowd. And as for their head-hunting proclivities—well, you probably picture the savages as ravaging and rampaging around the forest lopping off the head of any one who comes within range, whereas I knew very well head-hunting hasn't got anything to do with hunting at all. In most tribes it's a purely religious ceremony, performed with most impressive solemnities and a ritual and vestments all its own. In other cases it's merely a rite connected with the business of courtship. So, in view of these things, I knew it was quite unnecessary to worry myself about it at all.

"Then, again, you may consider it was absurd of me to think I could successfully tackle a job which had been too much for the Japanese Government. But don't you believe it. When it comes to negotiating with natural born savages, the average Government is about as much use as my foot. It's a one-man job. Look at Brooke in Borneo. He's the classical example. And then there's old Rhodes and the Matabele. The British Government and the Matabele naturally couldn't understand each other at all, and they were consequently drifting into what would certainly have been a most ghastly war. But when Rhodes went up-country single-handed and yarned with the chiefs man to man, they

soon got as thick as thieves, of course, and the trouble was settled in no time. Not that I put myself in a class with Rhodes and Brooke; but they're not the only men who've done things like that. Not by a long shot. I know dozens. Why, I met two fellows myself who, when it came to soothing the savage breast and making cannibals eat out of their hands, could give the average Colonial Secretary ninety yards in a hundred, and then win by ten lengths. One was a chap called Simpson, captain in some native regiment, and the other was Bliss, a pal of mine in the North Borneo police. You've never heard of them, of course, and I suppose hardly any one else has; but I happen to know, if it wasn't for Bliss and Simpson, we'd have had two exceedingly nasty and highly expensive little wars on our hands.

"Remembering these things, and my own little experiences in the Black River country and elsewhere, I girded up my loins and waded into the business bung full of confidence and hope. The Japanese had managed to capture a few Chinhwan in the course of their various expeditions, and they kept the poor beggars in a sort of compound outside Taihoku. I got a permit from the police, and went out to the place to have a look at them. There were about fifty or sixty Chinhwan there—a well-built, small-boned, intelligent-looking lot; but, of course, all very miserable and dejected. I'm enough of an ethnologist to see at once that they derived from Malay stock; and when I tried to talk to them, I found, although I couldn't understand them, that there were distinct points of similarity between their language and Malay. This encouraged me a lot, because I can speak four brands of Malay already, and I judged it oughtn't to take me very long to pick up a working knowledge of a fifth. I used to go up to that compound every

day, and I soon got on friendly terms there. I found a thing they pined for, even more than liberty, was a smoke, so I used to take in tobacco with me, and that put me on their good books at once. From then on the going was easy. I made special pals with two men who seemed to be rather more intelligent than the rest; and we three used to sit around and talk all day long, and I began to get a grip of their language in no time. In two months I suppose I could speak better Chinhwan than any other white man living; but it was about four months altogether before I was satisfied I could talk well enough to get along with up-country. I'd got more or less the hang of conditions in the interior by then, too, so I judged the time was ripe to start operations. I told my two savages that if they'd promise to guide me through the mountains and introduce me to their chief, I would help them to escape. They jumped at the proposition, of course. So that very day I bought a coil of rope. I hove the end of it over the compound wall after dark, the two Chinhwans swarmed over in a jiffy, and there we were. It was all very simple—that part; but my troubles began from then on. We had over twenty-five miles to go to get into the forest. Once there the Chinhwans were safe from the Japanese; but we had to do that twenty-five miles before daylight or get nabbed. We got to the first of the trees in about four hours, which wasn't bad, considering the country we went across and the heat. I was done to a turn by then, though, and I couldn't go on till I'd had a rest; but the Chinhwans were as fresh as daisies, and anxious to get ahead. When I did try to go on I found it was all I could do to work my way through the forest at all. I wish you could have seen that forest. The going was awful. It was like trying to force your way through a mixed hedge of blackberry, holly, hawthorn, and fish-

hooks, only more so. I chucked my hand in before I'd done a quarter of a mile. My clothes were pretty well torn off me by then, and what with the thorns and the leeches, I was leaking blood all over, and I couldn't find a square inch of sound skin on myself anywhere. What made it more annoying was to see those two savages slipping through that horrible tangle like a couple of greased snakes. It was really beautiful to watch them at it. I'd been told that a Chinhwan youth was not supposed to have arrived at the state of manhood until he'd proved it by traversing eighty miles of that forest between dawn and dusk. I hadn't believed that yarn, but after seeing my two friends perform, I became convinced that eighty miles a day was a mere nothing to them. However, as eighty yards a day seemed to be about my limit, and we had fifty or sixty miles more to do, I decided to send on one of my Chinhwan to prepare his chief for the arrival of a visitor, while I got myself out of that forest before it killed me.

"After that we traveled by night along the fringe of the plain until we got abreast of the bit of country my particular Chinhwan came from. The going was easy outside the trees, and we kept at it all night, hiding in the forest during the daytime. Even so it took me three days to reach the Chinhwan village, which was right in the middle of the mountains, and about six thousand feet up at that. I'm rather hazy about how I managed to get to the place. I'd had nothing to eat the whole time except some sugar-cane and a few bananas, and I think towards the end I must have gone slightly off my nut. The Chinhwan who'd stayed behind stuck to me like a brother; but when I gave out altogether he cleared off, and I thought he'd deserted me. It turned out, though, the faithful creature had only gone off to get help, and when he showed up again he'd got about

a dozen of his friends with him. Also some grub. I was glad to see him. Those chaps must have carried me most of the way after that; but I was down and out and completely done for by then, so I'm not quite sure what happened.

"However, it doesn't matter much how I eventually got to the village. I did get there in the end, and that's the main thing. I found it a mighty interesting place. It was built in a narrow valley, or rather a sort of deep crack in the side of a mountain that stood up straight on end; and the crack was so full of solid forest that it didn't look as if there was room in there for anything else. But hidden away under the trees were about thirty huts, stone huts; remarkably well built, too, of flat rock slabs. Which, let me tell you, is a very extraordinary thing, because, apart from traces of very ancient stone edifices in Java and some of the Western Carolines, the use of stone as a building material by the people in that part of the world is absolutely unknown. I got so excited over finding those huts that, for a day or two, I quite forgot my real reason for coming to the place. I took measurements of the buildings, and I made a number of drawings, which I'd show you if you took an atom of interest in the subject. But you don't, so I'll only say that those huts were ideal for the climate, and the Chinhwans lived a mighty comfortable sort of life. Their clothes were made of fine split grasses, beautifully woven and dyed, and they cultivated millet and maize in tiny clearings, and in that hot-house climate the stuff grew inches every night. Then the forest was full of bananas and paupau, game birds, wild pig, and buck. Not to mention monkeys, which, let me tell you, make a remarkably fine stew when properly seasoned with wild ginger and bamboo shoots. So you see the grub supply was no problem to

the Chinhwan, and, in fact, during the time I lived in that village, I put on about two stone.

"The chief was an old boy named Tamil-Pak. He was one of the most astute old gentlemen I've met for a long time—a natural born statesman of the very first water, and a decent old chap at that. I was the first white man he'd ever seen in his life, and he naturally regarded me at first with as much distaste and astonishment as you would show yourself if you suddenly came upon, say, a pale green cow. However, that feeling soon wore off with use, and it wasn't long before old Tamil-Pak and I were the closest kind of friends. I have to thank my eye-glasses for forging the first bonds of our friendship, because the chief, besides being afflicted with a large sore on his ham, suffered from weak eyesight due to age. As luck would have it, when the old boy fitted my glasses on his nose, he discovered to his joy and amazement that his sight had been miraculously restored. So, of course, I made him a present of the glasses, and established myself as first favorite at court. From that time on nothing was too good for me. Everything I did was all right, and anything I wanted I only had to ask for. Anything, that is, in reason. And reason as seen from Tamil-Pak's point of view. For instance, when I told the chief what I'd really come up to see him about, and said I'd like to send some Chinamen into his forest to cut down camphor-trees, he seemed to think it was one of the most unreasonable things he'd ever heard of. He said, when he was a young man, he often used to go down to the edge of the forest and look out over the flat lands. And he saw the plain all covered over with swarms of yellow men with black tails growing out of their heads. He told me how he used to watch those yellow creatures crawling all over the face of the land, sucking life out of its fatness like a lot

of maggots creeping over a dead pig. He said the thought of those maggots coming crawling over his mountains and through his forests made him feel sick. He went on like that for a long time until he made it seem as natural for a Chinhwan to kill a Chinaman in the forest as for you to squash a slug in your lettuce patch.

"I was properly stumped, and for a long time I didn't see what I was going to do about it; but I decided to stick to it, and try to make myself as useful to the old sinner as I knew how in the hope that he might eventually do what I wanted out of sheer friendship and goodwill. It was all I could do, anyhow. So I put my back into the job, and I managed to impress Tamil-Pak mightily with my powers. Amongst other things I showed him how to draw down fire from the sun by using the famous pince-nez as a burning-glass. This he regarded as a special and direct gift from the gods. He was frightfully bucked. The thing which really endeared me to him, though, was my demonstration of the fact that, if the juice expressed from ripe paupaus be kept in a gourd until it bubbles, it may be relied upon to produce a state of extreme and ecstatic bliss which subsequent head-swimmings and leg-wobblings do little to discount. This revelation of the charms contained in fermented liquor so affected Tamil-Pak that he said he loved me as a son, and it would certainly break his heart if I ever thought of going away and leaving him. He then went on to say that the manifestations of my magic powers had so far been exceedingly gratifying and satisfactory to all concerned. However, what he would really like to see me do more than anything else was to cure the sore on his thigh, which, he said, had been eating the strength out of him for years. In fact, he wanted me to begin that particular piece of magic then and there, because, he said,

if he wasn't cured soon, that sore would eat right into him and kill him.

"Now this was a bit of a facer. What the old boy was suffering from was a bad case of the yaws—a kind of large external ulcer common enough all through Melanesia. They are horrible things to look at, but not very difficult to cure provided one has the requisite dope handy. And I had nothing, of course; but I tried to look wise while I examined the old boy's leg, which had a hole in it big enough to put your fist into. I won't describe it; but you can take my word for it it looked horrid. Yet, in spite of its looks, I knew very well that, if only I had a little corrosive sublimate or some sulphur ointment, I could probably fix the thing in a few weeks. I was wondering what on earth I could do about it when I suddenly got a brain wave. I thought of a place higher up our mountain where there were some hot springs and a lot of holes with steam blowing out of them. It was a spot, according to the Chinhwan, much infested by devils, and they never went near it; but I'd been up there, and I remembered that the mouths of the blow-holes were encrusted with sulphur. And as soon as I thought of that sulphur I knew, with luck, I ought to be able to fix old Tamil-Pak's yaws for him in no time. By then, though, I was getting artful. I kept my thoughts to myself, for I saw now was my time to get what I wanted out of the old boy if only I played my cards right. I'd realized by that time that, if I wasn't careful, the more I did for the chief the more reluctant he would be to let me go. So I told him he was perfectly correct in believing his yaws would be the death of him if they weren't soon cured. Then I intimated that, although I could guarantee to cure him, yet I wasn't prepared to do it unless he agreed to my conditions first. My conditions were that Tamil-Pak must

allow me to go away when I wanted to, and that he must let me send my men into his country to fell camphor-trees.

"The old chap didn't like this at all. He was dead keen to get his leg put right; but he didn't want to lose his medicine-man; and as for letting any Chinese into his forest, he said he'd rather die first. And he wouldn't make any promises either, which was a very good sign, because it would have been easy for him to agree to all I asked and then to go back on his word when I'd cured him. This encouraged me to carry on, so I stuck to my guns and Tamil-Pak stuck to his, and we argued and bargained about the business for a full week. In the end, of course, he had to give in, for I'd put the fear of a fast approaching death into him, and that was a trump card. I had to modify my terms pretty considerably, though. We agreed, finally, that I was to cure him, first of all, and when I'd done that I could go if I insisted on it. He, on his part, would let me fell camphor-trees; but my operations were to be confined strictly to one outlying valley which he would show me. When I had a look at the place, I found it was a big valley running up into the hills from the edge of the plain, with enough camphor-trees in it to last for years as far as I could judge. So I closed with the offer. For good measure I had to promise to pay the old boy a visit at least twice a year, provided his people behaved themselves and left my wood-cutters alone.

"I felt mighty pleased with myself when all these diplomatic negotiations were successfully completed. I'd got what I came for, and I knew that valley full of camphor-trees was worth a fortune to me. Before I could go ahead collecting that fortune, though, I'd got to cure Tamil-Pak's yaws, and you can believe me I set about that business in as thorough a manner as I knew how. It wasn't an easy job.

One of the hardest things I had to do was to induce the old boy to go up with me to those hot springs. He objected strongly to associating with the devils which were well known to inhabit the place, and before he would move I had to convince him I was relying on those devils to help me with his cure. I had to spend a whole night by myself among those confounded blow-holes, though, before Tamil-Pak was satisfied the devils really were pals of mine. After that he seemed a little reassured. At any rate, he climbed up there with me the next day, and I made him sit with his leg in a steaming pot-hole that bubbled obscenely and stank horribly of boiled cabbage, sulphur, and rotten eggs. After six hours of that treatment I thought the leg ought to be fairly adequately cleaned, sterilized, and disinfected, so I plastered it with a mixture of melted fat and powdered sulphur, and we went home. We performed these rites and purifications for five days in all, and then Tamil-Pak struck. He said he preferred his yaws to the ministrations of my smelly devils, and he refused to go near those hot springs any more. However, it didn't matter much, because by then I was beginning to think myself that perhaps the hot pot-hole treatment was a bit drastic. From then on I contented myself with anointing the old boy's leg with my brand of sulphur ointment twice a day. And I think I'll have to patent the stuff. It certainly does the trick. It cured Tamil-Pak in just under a month, and if you'd seen his leg before I tackled it you certainly would have said it was a surgeon's job, not a quack's.

"I was really proud of that leg. I am still. It looked so beautiful and healthy by the time I'd done with it that I hated to leave it. But it was high time for me to go. For one thing, my conscience was pricking me. I'd been neglecting my museum people's interests shamefully. Also, I

hadn't smelt real tobacco for ages, and I was positively yearning for a smoke. I judged it might be wise, too, to clear out while Tamil-Pak's gratitude was still warm. Tamil-Pak was most upset when it actually came to parting. He really was. He's a good old soul, and he wept. And I felt I wanted to, too, because he'd treated me like a friend and a brother, and you don't often meet such a thorough old brick. However, we comforted ourselves with the thought that I'd be coming back to see him before very long, and I said good-by and departed with the old man's blessing, one dozen assorted smoked heads done up in a mat bundle, and an escort of ten men. The escort escorted me down to the edge of the forest and then vanished; and I walked out into civilization once more.

"Civilization, confound it, didn't like the look of me at all. I had an awful time. The first chap I met was a Chinaman cutting cane in a sugar plantation. He hove his chopper at me and fled. The second fellow was a Jap sportsman of sorts, with a shot-gun. He let off both barrels at me on sight, so *I* fled. Talk about savages! I tell you I soon wished myself safe back with old Tamil-Pak again. I judged it might be my costume which excited these people. You see, except for what remained to me of a pair of riding-breeches, I was dressed in full Chinhwan kit. So I hid in some bushes and discarded everything—except my trousers, of course, and my bundle of heads; and then I sallied forth and came upon a small boy driving two water buffaloes along a path. The buffs snorted, scented a white man, and charged me like a shot. The beggars always do, you know. They can't abide the smell of us or something. So I had to leave that place in a hurry. There weren't any trees handy, and all I could do was to dodge the brutes round a clump of bamboo. If they hadn't been yoked I

think they'd have got me; but, thank heaven, they tangled themselves up in the bamboos, and then the small boy came into action and kicked them in their stomachs, and they went away. The business turned out to be a blessing in disguise. It served as a sort of introduction, because the boy would undoubtedly have fled like smoke if he hadn't seen me running away first. As it was, he stood there and grinned at me. He was a bright child. I had some ten yen notes sewn up in my belt, and I got one out and waved it to him, and it convinced him of my respectability quicker than any visiting card could have done. Then I tried to explain I wanted to buy some clothes, and he soon grasped what I was getting at. He led me off to introduce me to his dad. Father was discovered immersed to his hams in a paddy field, transplanting young rice by hand. He was rather a stupid old man, and it took his young hopeful some time to make him understand that I really was fool enough to wish to buy his old clothes for the fabulous sum of ten yen. When he did grasp that fact, though, he proved himself to be a man of action by stripping himself there and then. His apparel consisted merely of a large straw hat, the usual coolies' blue jacket, and a mud-spattered loin cloth. But they were all I needed. They served, even better than a top-hat and frock-coat would have done, to reëstablish me as a conventional and respectable member of the common herd. So I put 'em all on, bar the loin cloth, and went off rejoicing.

"I walked towards the coast until I came to the railway; followed the line to the next station; bought a third-class ticket to Taihoku; and by nine o'clock that night I was giving Parmiter the surprise of his life. Poor old Parmiter, you see, was sitting in his veranda having his after-dinner smoke, when he was outraged by the sight of a strange and

filthy coolie calmly marching up his front steps. He shouted to his boy to throw the beggar out; and almost went off into a fit when that beggar said, 'Gie's a hand, my trusty freen, and here's a hand o' mine. We'll tak a richt guid wulliewaucht—and I could do with a cigar, too, if you don't mind.' I also mentioned a hot bath, some clean clothes, and a Christian meal; and all Parmiter could say at first was, 'Losh! Keep us.' However, he soon pulled himself together, and responded nobly to my various demands. When I was cleaned and clothed and fed I told Parmiter where I'd been and what I'd been up to. At first I let him take it for granted I'd gone up-country solely to collect heads, and I didn't mention the fact that I'd managed, incidentally, to make my fortune. I wanted to give him a joyful surprise. And when I did come out with it, at last, and told him about my valley full of camphor, I was somewhat surprised at the way he took my piece of news. He didn't say anything at all. He just sat up and stared at me as if he was rather stunned. I suggested he should go shares with me and develop the thing properly; and, as he still didn't say anything, I remarked that, for a man who'd just been offered the half of a pretty considerable fortune, he didn't seem unduly pleased. And at that he suddenly blew up in the most extraordinary fashion. He gave me, in fact, a fine illustration of what twenty years in the Far East can do to a man's temper, liver, and nerves. He sprang up, flung his tumbler of whisky on the floor, stamped on it, turned purple, started to curse, checked himself, and then gave utterance to the following remarkable words, 'Confound and blister that blasted German and all his damned, discommodious works,' said he. He meant it, too, and he looked so extraordinarily comic standing there in a sort of furious trance that I burst out laughing at him. So he flew

out at me then. He really was angry. It took me a long time to get him calmed down enough to explain what all the fuss was about. He then informed me, with tears of vexation rolling from his eyes, that the cup had been, so to speak, dashed from my very lips, and my valley full of camphor trees, which in the ordinary course of events would have been worth some thousands of pounds, was now worth—nothing. Just nothing at all!

"It seems, soon after I started up-country, some German chemist or other had succeeded in producing a synthetic camphor which could be manufactured in commercial quantities at a fraction of the cost of the true-blue article. The price of the synthetic stuff was so low, in fact, that the bottom had dropped right out of the market, and as good as killed the Formosan camphor industry stone dead. The Japs had practically ceased operations already, and Parmiter himself had retired from the business and was on the point of sailing for home. So there I was, you see. Properly flummoxed. I'd wasted a lot of my time and trouble—and that was all. I felt a bit vexed at first. But not for long. I soon got over it. I took it as a warning to stick to my own job in future and leave commerce strictly alone. Parmiter was much more upset about the thing than I was. We came home together in the same boat, and he used to break out several times a day and get black in the face cursing that German.

"Poor old Parmiter. I can understand his anguish at missing that fortune. He's a business man. But I, thank heaven, can view the whole thing with the calm detachment which distinguishes a truly scientific mind. So, if you'll lend me a hand, we'll just pack up these fruits of my scientific labors and ship them off to Chicago. That gentleman you've got hold of, by the way, is an absolutely unique

specimen. Handle him with care. He's a white man. You mightn't think it to look at his complexion; but that's only because he's been smoked. He was white enough once, though. Observe his teeth. That gold filling is a first-class piece of dentistry. American work probably. I expect he's a Yank. And if he hails from Chicago, he's likely to give his old friends a bit of a surprise."

## II

## A SAVAGE ISLAND

My life has been passed on various restful South Pacific atolls, with tranquil intervals of sojourn up divers West Coast creeks, at Alaid in the Aleutians, on the banks of a placid backwater just beyond the 184th bend of the Fly River, and in sundry other places of the kind. After an absence of twenty-five years, I stepped off the old *Byculla's* gangway at Tilbury, and set foot once more upon my native soil.

I was seated in the train bound for Fenchurch Street, gazing with dismay at Poplar's astounding array of dirty roofs and smoking chimney-pots, when something—possibly my sense of smell—made me think of Akassa Roads, with a gang of Krooboys loading kernels under a hot sun. I turned, and although it is hard to believe it, there *was* a Krooboy actually sitting there beside me, calmly smoking a pipe, and grinning as though the carriage belonged to him. I ejected the fellow, of course. I know of no country where natives are tolerated in compartments reserved for white men. But the extraordinary thing is that, within ten minutes, I was dumfounded to find myself in cells! What is more, it actually cost me £12 to get myself out again—£10 of a fine and £2 to the railway company, this latter sum being the alleged cost of repairs to the carriage door, which had unfortuntely become torn from its hinges. The poor creature who called himself a magistrate had the

audacity to tell me this necessary and disciplinary action of mine was "a most brutal and unprovoked assault." This, mind you, after I had explained my great restraint in waiting until the train stopped at a station, instead of immediately throwing the boy out on to the line.

Many things were done to me during the next few days; but I will pass them by in silence, because I do not wish, even now, to defame my native land. I must say, however, that the things I suffered at the hands of my own countrymen in the space of one week far and away surpassed any experiences I have ever undergone during a long life spent in the company of sailors, seal poachers, head-hunting savages and cannibals, and suchlike simple and easily understood folk. I had a very bad time of it. My life here was fast becoming unbearable, and I had, indeed, made up my mind to depart from this uncomfortable land and return to a certain brown and far-off people whom I understand and who understand me, when the gods (I suppose) took pity on me. At any rate, in my hour of need, they sent me my niece Ann.

She materialized at the moment chosen by the proprietor of my hotel to telephone for the police. The man, for some absurd reason, objected to my keeping a pair of extremely valuable bird-eating spiders in my bedroom, and because I refused to take any notice of his ridiculous objections, he proposed to have my spiders and myself removed from the hotel by force. But when Ann arrived she very soon settled this business. I explained to my niece that the requirements of my spiders with respect to temperature and food were very exacting, and that so far I had found no one competent or even willing to attend to their wants. "Are they pets, Uncle George?" said Ann. "I mean, are you fond of them?" And when I told her I

regarded the spiders merely as rare and interesting specimens, "Then the Zoo is the obvious place for them," said she. "We'll get a taxi now and take them there."

It seems to me that it is by no means a simple feat to find suitable homes, on the spur of the moment, for a pair of carnivorous spiders and a fish out of water like me; but the people at the Zoo were delighted to receive the spiders, and Ann's husband, John, seemed very glad to see me. I soon found out, however, that a job like that is nothing to my niece Ann. My niece is only about one-third of my weight and one-third of my age, and I could easily break her in half with my two hands. She has had, I should judge, less than one hundredth part of my experience of men and things, and yet I note that she serenely meanders, cool, calm, and triumphant, along the perilous and mazy paths of this life—paths which make *me* sweat blood to navigate and which even then lead me nowhere —except into trouble. I think this is very wonderful. And when I reflect that my gifted niece is not quite five feet high, it seems more wonderful than ever. Now, if the gods enwrap me in their snares, I merely grin and hie me—not in an argosy to Apollo's temple at Delphi, but per taxi to Ann's house in Gower Street. My Oracle very soon sets things right.

When I lay my troubles before Ann she laughs at me—so delightful an effect that I am glad any trouble of mine has the power to produce it. I make the most of my troubles, therefore. I enlarge enormously the magnitude of my dilemmas; and the sight of the lights which dance in Ann's eyes, as she considers my dilemmas and me, well rewards all my exaggerations.

"Uncle George," said Ann one day after she had succeeded in extricating me from a more awkward embroil-

ment than usual— "Uncle George, I don't believe London is really very good for you. You're not used to towns, you see, and I'm beginning to think a life in the country would be much more suitable for you."

"My child!" I cried (for I was frightened), "for pity's sake, don't tell me you mean to throw over your poor old uncle now! If you desert me—if you send me away, all alone, into the back-country—I'm certain to meet my death at the hands of the natives. You know I am. I beg you not to do it."

"Of course I won't," said Ann. "Until you can walk by yourself along these ways which you find so strange and difficult, I shall certainly hold your hand and lead you."

"If you'll do that," I said, "I'll promise to do my best to be a good boy and not give you too much trouble. I sit at your feet, eager—piteously eager, in fact—to hear expounded the proper conduct of life as it must be lived in England. I'll do everything you tell me—but I simply can't wear a starched collar. For goodness sake, leave me my soft shirt, and I'll promise to sacrifice everything else to the gods of this land."

"Very well, then," said Ann, "I'll take you in hand and teach you how to behave. First of all you must shave off that beard, you know. Will you?"

"I will," said I, in the tones of a man who is marrying an ugly girl solely for her money. For I am attached to my beard.

"Good child," said Ann. "But you needn't. I only said that to test you. Just have it trimmed to a nice point—like admirals. You must do that and let John take you to his tailor, and then we'll get out of Town as soon as we can. Then I'm sure you'll find things much easier for you. And anyhow, you really *ought* to see the country now you have

come home. To find out about England you've got to get right into the country and live amongst—and oh! that reminds me. I've been wanting to do it for years—and now we *will!* Of course. It's the very thing! We'll hire a caravan! We'll go away right into the country, and it will be lovely, and then you really will see what England's like, and you'll love it, and I know you can hire them quite cheaply now by the week or the month, and they're all nicely fitted up inside with bunks and a stove and pots and pans and everything, and if the weather's good it will be perfect, and we'll take a tent for you and John, and I can sleep in the van. There!" said Ann, drawing breath at last, "won't it be splendid?"

"Rotten," said John, emerging from a magazine which appears to deal exclusively with motors. "A caravan's a perfectly putrid notion. I know exactly what it means. There'll be nowhere to camp, because the farmers and people simply won't hear of you going on their land. So it means the side of the road, and cheeky village kids climbing in at the windows and watching you eat and shave and everything. Awful! And how about cooking? And washing up? And then there's the horse. A horse is always a nuisance. Always wants feeding and cleaning and looking after generally. Who'll manicure the horse? You know nothing about horses, Ann. You know you don't. And I know less—and I'm proud of it. Awful brutes. Always getting windgalls and springalls and shying about and things like that. You've no control over a horse. They're not like motors. Reins are a mere mockery; and if a horse wants——"

"Hold on, John," I said. "I think the caravan is a very good notion. If there is one thing I can do, it's make things comfortable in camp. So don't you worry about

that. I'll run that end of things. And I'll cook. I'm a good cook. I pride myself on it. And I may not know much about England; but you can't tell me the side of the road is the only place we'll be able to camp in. That's absurd. You leave that to me. I always did have an eye for a camping site. I'm with you about horses, though. Horses are a mistake. Horses are too civilized, and a nuisance to themselves and every one else. It takes one man all his time to look after one horse. And if the flies get at 'em they die at once. But *mules,* now. Mules are different. I like mules, and they understand me. Mules are no trouble at all. They are sensible creatures, and never need cleaning, or feeding either, because the great point about them is they can always live on the country. I vote we take a couple of mules."

"If you two have quite done, I will go on," said Ann. "We will take neither horses nor mules. How ridiculous! We will take the car. You are always boasting about what the car can do, John, so I suppose it can pull a caravan?"

"Pull anything with forty horse-power," said John. "But, good golly, Ann! you can't expect the poor old bus to go towing a confounded van about all over England."

"Why not?" demanded Ann.

"Well——" said John, rather sheepishly, I thought. "Er —it isn't done, dash it!"

"Then let's do it. And it *is,* anyway," said Ann. "I've seen a catalogue, and they make lots of them now—little light two-wheeled ones—specially for towing behind cars."

"*Do* they, by gum?" said John, putting down his paper and getting interested. "I didn't know that. A light two-wheeled trailer *is* a notion. If we fitted a special gadget on the dumb irons, with a buffer for the tow-bar, and fixed up a self-acting brake on the van-wheels—I believe, Ann,

it would be rather a lark. Where did you say you put that catalogue?"

John, I have forgotten to mention, is interested in three things only—viz., motors, oil, and Ann. John's idea of paradise is to bury himself up to the neck in the reeking intestines of his enormous car, and, while performing operations upon the thing with spanners, to cover himself with grease, and to lecture, in technical language, upon the various symptoms of the case to a bored and totally uncomprehending wife. Thus when John understood that the car was to take part in the expedition, he flamed into enthusiasm at once. For myself, I was sorry to lose the mules. I like and understand mules, while motors are a dark mystery to me. I consider motors are worse than horses. However, I knew enough by then not to argue with Ann.

"We'll hire a van for a month," said she. "And first of all, we'll go to Derbyshire, because it's wild and moory and full of mountains. I've motored through there before, and it's lovely."

I am accustomed to the organization of expeditions, so I volunteered to organize this one. "It always pays," said I, "to travel light, and to carry only those things which make one independent of the inhabitants. We'll take a blanket each, and I won't need a tent during May in England, surely? I'll sleep under the van. We'll want three good knives, a fork or two and a spoon, three mugs, a frying-pan, a Kaffir pot, an ax, a kettle, and a bucket. For grub we'll take a sack of flour, a side of bacon, salt, sugar, tea, baking powder or Eno's and a sack of potatoes and onions. A little rice or oatmeal is useful, but not necessary; and I never travel without raisins. Mountains and moors, you say? That sounds like birds, so I'll take a gun as well as my rifle. There shouldn't be any flies about, so we needn't

take nets. There's nothing more, except soap and matches, of course. And don't bring a change of clothes, because, I assure you, it's much easier to wash a shirt than carry about a spare one. When shall we start?"

These were the words of an old and tried campaigner; but I regret to say they were greeted with scorn and derision.

"You poor, dear, innocent creature," said my niece, "we're not going off to the wilds of Borneo. Derbyshire is in the middle of England. A blanket each, indeed! *I'm* going to take four blankets, and sheets, and an eiderdown. And whatever do you want all that flour for—and the Eno's?"

"To make bread with, of course," I said.

"Bread! You poor pathetic thing. Why, when we want bread, we'll buy it. And whoever heard of a whole side of bacon. No, Uncle George. I think, if you don't mind, *I'll* take charge of the commissariat department. You can cook."

"And I say, old chap, you can't go shooting off rifles and things all over the place," said John. "You'll kill some one; and, anyway, all those moors are preserved. You'd get run in. And if you take my tip, you'll certainly have a tent. You simply *can't* sleep out-of-doors in England. I know. I've tried it. Somebody stole my boots, a goat ate most of my breeches, and a cow woke me up in the middle of the night and nearly scared me to death. She was licking my face. So—you believe me and have a tent, or you'll regret it. And as for not taking a change of togs and things, that's all rot. Hang it all! let's be comfortable. There'll be room in the van for loads of odds, junk, and muckings. You let me look after that part of the show, old man. I do believe you'd even grudge me my pyjamas!"

I mention this conversation to show that I can in no

way be held responsible for the extraordinary outfit which drew up outside Ann's door at 5 o'clock one dark and rainy May morning. I had been waiting on the doorstep since 4 A.M., that being the hour appointed by John for the start, because, as he said, "Ann has never towed a trailer before; but she insists on driving, so we'd better get out of town before all the traffic starts."

John, I fear, is not a trained observer, otherwise he would have noted that his city's traffic begins to flow past his own front door at some time prior to 4 A.M. At that hour a steady stream of carts and lorries sets in along the street to the southward, while an intermittent drift of pedestrians trickles past from the north and west. The pedestrians, curiously enough, have all one very strongly marked characteristic. They are all, I noted, in a very great hurry; yet each man has from five to forty-five minutes to waste, and is eager and anxious to waste them. If you do not believe this, I suggest you try an experiment. Station yourself, at four in the morning, at any doorway in Gower Street, and deposit there a roll of blankets with a fry-pan and billy on top. Take a three-legged Kaffir pot and sit on it; and if you are wearing a beard and a wide Stetson hat, so much the better. You will then discover that every single person proceeding along the street will stop and gaze at you—with awe at first, then with wonder, and finally with derisive disapprobation. In ten minutes the crowd of your admirers will block the near pavement; and in twenty minutes it will extend half-way across the road. And if a long, low, powerful-looking chassis, with a disreputable old Ford body strapped on to it, then appears, towing behind it a little house on wheels, then you may rely upon it that Gower Street will fill with people from side to side —and from end to end, too, probably,—although I am not

certain about this latter point, because a policeman arrived just then and made himself officious.

"Good Gad, uncle," cried John, "in trouble again? What have you been up to this time? Is that your gear? What's that rum-looking pot with the little legs? What do you think of this for a cross-country car? Has Ann got up yet?"

"Replying to your queries in due order," I said, "the answer to the first is in the negative. I have been sitting here quietly for one hour—waiting. This is my usual camping outfit, and that is a Kaffir pot. As for the car, why have you taken off the mudguards and body? I think you have successfully ruined the looks of a once beautiful vehicle. And there are no signs of Ann at all, although I have shouted outside her door at least thrice."

"The lazy little wretch," said John. "I turned out when you did, and rushed off to get this outfit from the garage, and she said she was getting up then. Here! I'll rouse her."

John fell over a heap of hampers, bags, and bundles, which he had piled up in the hall the night before, and then ran upstairs, with shoutings. I looked at that heap of baggage, and experienced, not for the first time, certain misgivings. It was a very big heap, and when I looked at the caravan it seemed a very small caravan. It was about ten feet long and six feet wide, with a door at the back and little windows at each side. I opened the door of the thing and explored. The place was a miracle. Along each side were plush-covered settles which were supposed to pull out and turn into beds. A carpet! Curtains! Electric light! As I live by bread, the thing was lighted by electricity. There was an oil-stove in a recess, and also an ice-chest. And cupboards, fitted amazingly with trouser-clips! Trouser-clips clutching glasses, cups, pots, and jugs—a complete set, in fact, of crockery and cooking utensils, but

all of small doll's-house size. I thanked the gods, therefore, that I had insisted on bringing my own camp gear, in spite of all opposition, and the fact that the following words appeared (twice) in the book of instructions supplied by the caravan people. "Each van," they wrote, "is replete with every possible convenience. A very full and complete outfit is supplied, and everything that the heart of a camper can desire will be found (securely clipped, so that they cannot rattle) inside the van's many and commodious cupboards." In spite of this confident assertion, the only really serviceable article I could discover in the whole affair was one canvas bucket, and my misgivings concerning the success of the expedition were beginning to weigh heavily upon me—when John appeared. John handed in a spare tire, two tins of petrol, one tin of lubricating oil (leaking), a Dutch cheese, a fur coat, and three cushions. John said, "You stow the things and I'll bring 'em out to you. There's a lot of stuff to come."

There was.

John's second load consisted of two obese rolls of bedding, one cooked ham (naked), one rubber hot-water bottle, a dog basket, an umbrella, two pairs of shoes, and three camp-stools. John said, "Stow 'em so that they'll balance. She's only on two wheels remember. Have you noticed the lights?"

The chief components of the third load were one can of kerosene, two loaves, a burst bag of potatoes, one large box of assorted groceries, two dozen eggs in a paper bag, more cushions, one leather dressing-case, some loose potatoes, and a deck-chair. John said, "Woosh! some armful. Look out for the eggs. Ann is getting up now. She says we've been so long stowing things that we'd better have breakfast before we start. And she wants to know if there's

a mirror in the van, because, if not, I'm to get one."

The fourth load—but no. You would not believe it. Suffice it to say there were eight loads, each more wonderful than the last, and that, when they were all in, the van was full and running over. John said, "That seems to be about the lot, except for Ann's things and the dog and some odds and ends that are bound to turn up when we start. Let's feed."

We got under way eventually at nine o'clock. It was raining hard, but Ann drove off at speed. At the end of Gower Street we became involved with a coster's cart, a furniture van, and four busses. Ann stopped and reversed, and the caravan slewed half left and jammed there, grunting. John said, "You *can't* go astern. It puts the van brakes on automatically." A policeman said, "Back up, back up. What are yer playin' at?" Ann said, "I can't back. What *have* you done to the car, John? The floor boards have fallen out now, and if I let go the wheel or take my feet off the pedals, I'll fall through and run over myself." The impatient traffic of all Euston and the Tottenham Court Road piled up about us, chafing, and there were horn blowings and cursings. Also there were jeers. "Blime!" bawled a 'bus conductor, "'ere's a blinking circus." "Not it, it ain't," said the coster, fastening a burning gaze on me. "It's a blooming Zoo on wheels, that's what it is. There's lions in that little cage behind, I betcher. And what price the ugly old gorilla in the back seat. Will you look at 'is bleedin' whiskers!"

The policeman now became annoyed with us, but not for long, because my niece Ann has a way with her which policemen apparently cannot resist. So in a little while the arm of the law waved and cleared a way for us, and we left that place amid cheerings.

We proceeded at speed—at great speed, in spite of the trailer and its load. Ann's car is very powerful, and though Ann is so small that she has to peer through the lower half of the steering-wheel to see what is before her, yet she drives habitually as if she were a she-angel fleeing from the improper advances of the devil. That is how she drives. Now, I can put up with speed—qua speed—for an indefinite period, and I can sit still (though pushing with my feet) for several hours while death and calamity flash by, missing me merely by inches. But it seems I cannot endure four unguarded wheels flinging mud and road sweepings over me for more than one hour. At any rate, at the end of that time I protested.

"Stop!" I said. "It's all very well for you two sitting there behind that wind-screen, but it's pure hell in this back seat. The wheels have been showering filth into my face ever since we started. I can understand you changing the body, John; but why, in heaven's name, take off the mud-guards too?"

"We'll be going through fields and gates and ditches and things," replied John, "and I wanted to make sure we didn't get any of her paintwork dented. You are in a mess, though. Here, change places with me."

"No," I said. "No. Until the rain stops and the roads get dry I'm going to join Lum Fat and travel in the van. I ought to have thought of that before."

Lum Fat, I have forgotten to mention, is an elderly Pekingese gentleman who belongs to Ann, and who goes wherever she goes. He is a friend of mine too, and when I opened the door of the van he seemed very pleased to see me. He appeared, however, for some reason, to desire exceedingly to get out; but I restrained him, and we pro-

ceeded. Indeed, inside that van it seemed as though we were proceeding at greater speed than ever. The motion in there was astounding. We jolted and lurched, we bounced and wriggled; we pitched like a North Sea drifter pounding into steep head seas, and we rolled as if we were running our easting down through the Roaring Forties. Sometimes we did all these things at once, and then the result was terrific.

I had entered the van with thoughts of a quiet pipe out of the wind; but I took one puff and then put that pipe away; for, in the words of a New Caledonian boy I once owned, "Belly belong me no good. Him walk about plenty too much." Now, I am a good sailor, and I pride myself on the fact. I have never been seasick in my life, and I boast about it. And I remembered I had so boasted before Ann.

The van swayed sickeningly around a bend, and I found myself striving fiercely with the patent fastenings of the side window. It was a very ingenious patent, though, and its mysteries defeated me. I turned to the door, at which my Chinese friend was so desperately clawing that I saw he would eject himself, regardless of all consequences, the instant I opened it. Just then he threw up his head, and I thought he was going to howl. But it was otherwise with him. My fellow victim, it appeared, was feeling even worse than I was. He had, in fact, reached a grave crisis in his malady.

There was no window in my prison's front; but I fled to the forward end and beat upon the wall, uttering the while urgent and appealing cries to Ann to stop her headlong progress. But the car, with an exhaust that assuredly must have been wide open, sped onwards, heedless and in-

exorable, dragging behind it a torture chamber full of dire happenings, and resounding with the despairing wails of two tormented souls.

Æons passed. . . .

At last, for one short moment, we slowed to weave our way through a providential herd of driven heifers, and on the instant Lum Fat and I burst from the door of the van. The car fled onwards, promptly, but a green-faced man and a yellow-haired dog remained behind to astonish vastly fourteen red heifers and their driver, a very wet person with a goad.

"Lorks!" said the person with the goad, lifting his hands to heaven, "you'm falled oot! Are you'm hurt?"

"We *are* hurt," I said. "We suffer at the moment from dreadful internal injuries. However, they will pass, so pray do not unduly concern yourself. You will oblige me, though, by calling your cows off my dog. He is hardly in a fit state to repel their hostile advances. He is, in fact, a little out of training."

In due course the fourteen red heifers lost interest in us and departed, and the man with the goad had perforce to depart with them. He did not want to go. He moved away stern first, and as he went he seemed to muse deeply. He was clearly loth to leave unsolved this mystery of man and dog—these two pale ghosts which had materialized so unexpectedly.

Thirty healing minutes passed before we saw the car returning. It came slowly down the road as though questing.

"Hurrah! There they are," cried John, sighting us from afar. Then, "Are you hurt?" he shouted.

I did not deign to answer, preferring to reserve my fire until the range became pointblank, when I meant to shoot

to kill. This was a mistake. I should have poured out all I wished to utter before Ann could get into action. "Oh, you poor darlings!" said she, drawing up her chariot before us, and spiking my batteries with one pitying look from her fine eyes. "You poor wet things. What a fright you gave me. When we discovered you had gone we thought for the moment you must have fallen out and hurt yourselves. Did you?"

"We did not fall out," said I firmly. "We *got* out, deliberately and quite of our own accord."

"But why? If you wanted to get out, why didn't you call?"

*"Call!"* I cried. "Call——" And indignation choked me. But when John said, "What was the matter, anyway? What did you want to get out for?" then I came to. "John," I said, as Lum Fat and I annexed his seat behind the windscreen, "if you *must* know, try a ride in that van yourself. Just call, will you, if you want to get out at any time. You may remember the man who designed the caravan boasts in print that the thing is 'replete with every possible convenience.' Well, he lies. He forgot to provide an emergency signal. You know the thing. 'To stop the train, pull down the chain. Penalty for improper use, five pounds.' It should have one of those affairs. It needs one—badly."

"Hum!" said John, investigating the van's interior. "I think after all I'll ride in the back seat. I *thought* you looked a bit green about the gills, uncle."

Once more we proceeded. It was still raining. And it seems to me it will make the relation of this adventure more simple if I say at once that it rained and continued to rain and did not stop raining once until we got home again. And also I would like to state here publicly, that my one experience of an English May has left me with

very kindly feelings towards the rainy season at Zamboanga.

We sped onwards through a sodden country, sad as a Spitzbergen marsh in thaw-time, and draped, like Anticosti, with raw and doleful mists. There was not much conversation. Once John spoke feelingly from his back seat. "For the love of Mike," said he, *"why* didn't I bring the hood?" A little later he said, "What a perfect fool I was to take off those mudguards." Later still he said, "If you'd rather stick this than ride in the van, then it *must* have been a terror."

At the bitter end of that afternoon we ran into a district full of gloom, rocks, and deep dark gorges. "Buxton," said Ann. "When we get through here we'll be on the moors, so look out for nice places to camp in."

"There ought to be some nice hotels in Buxton," said John. "Why not camp in one of them?" But my four feet and a half of niece was made of sterner stuff. "Hotels!" cried she. "Why, we're towing our own hotel behind us."

She drove on, ruthlessly, through a wet depressing country, along gloomy lanes, up endless twisty hills, and out at last into a high, bleak, desolate region, shrouded in cloud and afflicted grievously with bitter winds. In the midst of these horrors Ann stopped and gave utterance to the following dreadful words: "I've lost the road," said she; "but it doesn't matter, because these are the moors. It's getting dark, and we'd better camp here."

"Here!" I cried. *"Here.* For pity's sake, Ann, not here! I've had to camp in some desperate places in my time. There's a certain mangrove swamp, for instance, that lives in my memory still. I passed a pleasant night there astride a bunch of knobbly roots, shaking land-crabs out of my

trouser-legs most of the time, and picking leeches off myself between whiles. But that swamp was cosy compared to this appalling place. It was warm there, at least. And I'm sure we'd better get out of here before we all freeze to death."

John said, "Hang it all, Ann, we can't camp here. This is a terror. I vote we unhitch the van and run about in the car a bit and see if we can't find somewhere sheltered. We might run across a pub, too, which would be grateful." He uncoupled the van, and, in spite of Ann's protests, we drove off, leaving the thing by the roadside. John drove, because Ann was, I think, annoyed with us. "You men are such fussers," said she. "What does it matter where you camp when you've got a caravan? You get in—and there you are. Comfy and at home. The place we left the van in is as good a spot as you'll find anywhere about here. The moors are all the same; and if you are looking for woods and shelter and things like that—well, you won't find them, because there aren't any."

And it was even so. We rushed and bucketed about that disgusting moor until black night descended on us; but we saw no signs at all of anything like shelter. There were no houses, of course, for no man would deliberately design to live in a place of that kind. Also there are no public-houses where no houses are; and John realized this great truth after a while. "This is hell," said he, "and it's getting worse. We'll have to go back to the van and make the best of it. By the way, where *is* the van?"

"You've been going down wind all the while," I said, "as bucks will do in this same kind of weather. I noticed that, so the van must now be up to windward somewhere. But that's all I can tell you."

"By gum!" said John, "if we've lost the van, we're done for. We'll perish." And Ann said nothing—which I thought very noble of her.

I do not know how long it took us to find the van again, because I carry about inside me a collection of malaria germs which generally wake up and become hostile if I get wet or chilled. All I can say, therefore, is that centuries slowly passed before John cried out suddenly in a loud voice and jammed on his brakes hard. We then bumped heartily into something which gave before us with splintery noises. We had found the caravan.

I did not help to pitch that camp, for my germs, stimulated by the perfect conditions, laid me low. I have a vision of most of those articles which I had stowed away so carefully being flung out of the van into the wet night, and the next things I remember are a strong smell of brandy, Ann's cool hand on my brow, and myself, full of icy burning shivers, lying on the velvet settle, wrapped in many blankets and an eiderdown quilt, with a hot-water bottle burning my toes.

"Thank you," I said; "that's better. It knocks me out at first, but I generally get through the worst of it in an hour or so. I'm feeling much better already, thanks to you. And I apologize, Ann. I take it all back."

"What?" asked Ann.

"Why—all the nasty things I said about your outfit," I replied. "These blankets, for instance, and the eiderdown; to say nothing of the hot-water bottle. And it seems to me I'm wearing John's pyjamas. If you had left me in my sleeping-bag to fight my fever outside in the wet, I expect I should have died. You see, I'm used to kindly climates; not the man-killing brand I can hear howling outside now."

Just then we were enveloped by an overpowering smell of fish. It was John cooking. John clings to the belief that he is an artist with the frying-pan. John says, "Give me a frying-pan and some oil and I can perform wonders." He can. I watched him open a second tin of sardines and pour the contents into the sputtering reeking pan, which he then flourished ostentatiously. "Sardines on toast, my boy," said he. "I'll show you. Hang it! The oil's slopped out, Ann. Wipe it up before it soaks into the cushions. This confounded stove doesn't give half enough heat. I think I'll try the Primus. And give me that bottle of olive oil. That's the stuff to fry with."

The van filled solidly with blue and nauseous fumes; but through the haze I could see John working briskly. He used in succession the oil stove, the Primus, a spirit lamp, the frying-pan, a sauce-pan, and the lid of a biscuit tin; and he managed to achieve (in something over one hour) an appalling smell—some charred bread soused in oil, and a mess of sardines apparently mashed and boiled. "No, thank you, John," I said, as he handed me with pride a plate of this dreadfulness. "It looks delicious, but I never mix fish with quinine."

It seems incredible; but I suppose I must have slept, because the next picture that comes back to me is the sight of my niece, swathed like a cocoon, stretched on the other settle, and John rolled up on the floor in my sleeping-bag. He lay in a pool of water, and Lum Fat was seated, shivering, on his chest. The caravan swayed and trembled under the blows of a fierce wind; and something, probably the last collision, had started the seams of our fragile roof, for the rain was leaking in all over us. We were all very wet, and all apparently very wide-awake and miserable; for when I groaned a groan of spiritual anguish, John sat up

and said feelingly, "Yes; that's just what I think too." And Ann said, "Uncle, you ought to be put in a warm bed. Let's drive back to Buxton."

At these momentous words hope suddenly blazed up within me, and apparently within John too. We both sprang up, and it may have been our joyous and convulsive movement, or perhaps the wind did it. At any rate, the caravan seemed to sink by the stern just then, and we felt it running backwards, jolting and bounding down the hill. Something arrested us before we had gathered too much way (I think it was a loosely built stone wall from the general feel of things), and for the second time that day Lum Fat and I ejected ourselves frantically from that pestilential van. Ann was the coolest person in the party. She investigated the wreck and remarked, "The wheels are still on, and I think she'll travel. We'll couple her up to the car and see. If she goes, she goes; and if she doesn't, we'll leave her, for we've got to get uncle to bed." Now, my fever by this time had left me; nevertheless I judged it wise not to disclose this material fact to Ann. To tell the truth, the prospect of an early termination to our disastrous adventure made me dissemble, and I am ashamed to say I chose that moment to utter a spurious groan, the while sham shuddering convulsed me.

The expedition retreated, and I made a tent in the back of the car, and Lum Fat coiled down inside it with me. Behind us clattered the caravan. It groaned; but holding itself miraculously together, it followed faithfully still. We fled swiftly through the night, and each turn of the wheels bringing nearer the end of that awful adventure, by so much was my soul uplifted. But presently I fell sickeningly to earth again. We stopped. We had taken a wrong turning. We were lost again, and I emerged from my tent

to observe John striving to climb a wet signpost and keep a match alight at the same time. It was a pathetic spectacle. "It's no good, Ann," he said. "I can't read it. Just drive on as hard as you can, and we're bound to get out of this in time and find a main road."

Our engine roared, and we flew along a lane so deep and narrow that presently I dismantled my tent and sat up, because I like to have my arms and legs free when threatened with imminent disaster. I knew our headlong speed was due to Ann's anxiety to get a sick man quickly into bed, and so I made no protest; but it seemed to me that the bed I was destined for would be most certainly situated in the accident ward of a hospital. I watched, with shrinkings, our lane grow narrow and more narrow still, until the stone walls on either side pressed close, threatening to rape from us our faithful caravan. It was all very dreadful, and I was heartily glad when we came to the hill. That hill looked so steep that I thought it must surely stop us, when I proposed to alight and die in peace upon the roadside. I changed my mind about that hill, though, for soon the glare of our headlights revealed the lane standing up straight on end before us. It was not a hill at all, but a very precipice; and when John cried, "Rush it, Ann! It's our only chance. We can't reverse, remember," I sent up a hurried prayer.

With a crash of gears and a bellowing from our exhaust as of a thousand maddened bulls, we rushed the hill. We roared up that herring-gutted lane, and the beams from our headlamps pointed straight to heaven. Then the lights shone suddenly on the front of a house, dead ahead, and we stopped with a jolt, while I got out without troubling to open the door.

"She's sliding back. I can't hold her!" cried Ann; and I

thanked the gods for a countryside which fences its roads with loose stone, as I ravished bowlders from the wall and rolled them under our skating wheels.

"We're in a dead end," said John, exploring. "We can't turn, because I believe the van would roll over sideways, the hill's so steep. We need ropes to lower us down a cliff like this. And we can't back out. It would be sudden death to try it."

A window opened in the wall above us, and a female voice made outcry. "Oh, Lor-a-mercy, Jim," it screamed, "'tis the fire-enjine! The house is a-burning. Oh lor! O me! Oh my!" The voice then withdrew, yelling, and a man called, "'Oo is it? What's up? Are we afire?"

"No," said Ann. "You are *quite* all right. Please tell that woman to stop screaming. This isn't a fire-engine. It's a caravan, and we've lost our way."

"Dry *up,* Maria!" said the man. "We ain't afire, I tell you. It's gypsies. Now you clear out of here, you dirty thieving scum, before I set the dogs on you. You're lost, are you? Well, I'll tell you what. You're trespassing. You're on a private road, and if you found your way up you can find your way down again. Waking a man up from his bed this time of night—drat and blast you. Get out now, quick, or I'll come down to you."

"Yes. Come down, do," I said. "Come down and I'll wring your nasty neck."

"Hush, uncle," said Ann. "Look here. You are making a mistake. We aren't gypsies. We got here by mistake, and we can't turn round. I'm awfully sorry we woke you up; but, now we *have,* I wonder if you'd be kind enough to let us come in out of the rain until the morning. We're all very wet and cold. In fact, this gentleman ought to be in bed. He's very ill."

"Yes; he sounds ill," said the man. "He's the one who wants to wring my neck, ain't he? No more of it now. You don't get in here, not if I know it, you artful little tinker's slut! I've got my gun here, and if any of you try any games, bless me if I don't pepper you with it." The window then shut with a slam.

"Charming chap," said John. "I could see we weren't going to get much help out of him, so I've been looking round. The only thing to do is to make a gap in the wall and run the whole business through into the field. We can turn there and get back on to the road right end foremost. The wall's only made of loose stones, thank goodness."

We fell to work silently, and the top row of stones had been removed when mysterious white shapes, vague but enormous, materialized within the field. They advanced upon us, grunting, and John said, "Gosh!" and scrambled back into the road. I had visions of charging rhino, so I followed him. But Ann said, "Nonsense! They're only pigs. Gracious, the field seems full of them."

John is young and bold. He climbed over the wall again and proceeded with the work of demolition. The years, however, have taught me caution. Also I heard just then the latch of the house-door click, so I faced about and prepared to fight a rear-guard action. The door opened and revealed a small fat man, clad in a long white night-shirt, and carrying a lantern which obviously blinded him.

"Carry on with the job, John—*quietly,*" I whispered, "while I distract the enemy's attention." I advanced upon the foe, making conciliatory noises; but the wretched man would have none of me. "Keep off!" he cried, backing. "Be off with you, you thieving brutes, or I'll shoot. You're after me pigs; that's what it is. I know you."

"Pigs!" I cooed. "Pigs! My dear fellow, you are laboring

under a most extraordinary misapprehension. We are not thieves or gypsies, I assure you. We are touring the country in this motor caravan, and have lost our way in the dark. We ran up this cul-de-sac by mistake, and most unfortunately disturbed you. I am extremely sorry; but we will go away as soon as we can turn the caravan round. My friends are now, in fact—er—making the necessary adjustments."

"Oho!" said the man. "Motor folk, are you?" His voice had changed, and there were in it now the notes of greed and a certain furtive meanness. He pondered. "Well, then," he went on, "you ought to be ashamed of yourselves, rampaging about in the middle of the night and frightening me—frightening my missus, that is, into fits. She *did* have a fit—almost. And she seven months gone an' all. Yes. It'll be serious; and you ought to be made to pay for it. If I sued you for compensation——"

"Certainly," I said in my most soothing tones. "Compensation. Of course. You *shall* be compensated. But don't let us stand out here in the rain any longer. Hadn't we better go in and talk it over? You haven't got much on, you know, and you'll catch cold."

"I will. I'm sure to," replied that crafty creature. "I'm mortal liable to colds, and as likely as not I'll catch my death out of all this. There's one thing, though: you'd have to pay me for it."

"With pleasure," said I. "I mean—certainly. We will. But, if you won't let me in, suppose we adjourn to the caravan. You would probably like to see it. It's most comfortable inside. And I have a bottle of brandy there that'll do us both good."

"Ah! Brandy, is it?" said he. "Well, I *will* have a drop if you say so. But don't you get thinking a drink or two's

going to pay me for this night's work. Why, I wouldn't take a ten-pun' note for the damage you've done to my missus alone, let alone me."

He then climbed into the van, and, as the Fates would have it, trod upon Lum Fat, who immediately went into action and bit him on the leg. He then savaged the man's bare ankles, tore the front out of his night-shirt, and fled, with lion-like growlings, out into the night. His exploit, though neat, was most untimely; and it did not help matters that, even through his victim's lavish lamentations, we could hear that alleged lap-dog worrying his trophy in triumph underneath the van. This unfortunate episode might, perhaps, have made me sorry for the man; but, when it became clear that he rejoiced at this opportunity of raising his bill for consequential damages, then I remembered he had called my niece Ann "an artful little tinker's slut," and I hardened my heart.

Half a tumblerful of brandy may be relied upon to produce curious effects if poured into an empty stomach at two in the morning. At any rate, it induced my newfound friend to (1) hang his lantern on a non-existing hook; (2) fling himself carelessly on to the settle; (3) state, with emphasis, that £100 cash down would not even begin to make up for all he had suffered that night; and (4) to hold out his glass for what he called "another go of that there gargle, mister. And don't you spoil it *this* time with any of your water." Five minutes later the second half-tumbler load had disappeared, when I understood my friend to state that he regarded me as a most excellent fellow, that a fat check was the one and only cure he knew for hydrophobia, and that he would be glad to sell me his wife Maria for £250 down. However, his utterance was considerably impeded by this time, so perhaps I

may be maligning the fellow. By the time he had finished the bottle his mood changed. He wept. He assured me that I had blasted his life and his love, and that he proposed to retain possession of the caravan as security for these outrages. He then turned his face to the wall with a gesture both tragic and final, and slept.

I shut him in and left him. I found the breach in the wall had been completed, and from the field beyond came shouts and barkings. "Stop them. Oh, stop them!" I heard Ann cry, and then a boiling torrent of pigs poured through the gap and engulfed me. "Now we *have* done it," said John. "Why didn't you stop them? We just went into the field to find a good place to turn the car, and then Lum Fat must have chased them. Where's your friend?"

"He really *will* be angry with us now," said Ann. "Where is he? What did you say to him?"

"Well, he did most of the talking," I said. "But don't worry. I have—calmed him. I've settled everything with him, and he's quite satisfied now—and happy. As a matter of fact, I think he's turned in and gone to sleep."

"Oh, good!" said Ann. "But what about the pigs? He doesn't know they've escaped, does he?"

"No," I said, "he doesn't. And I think we'd better get out of this before he does, or there'll be more trouble."

John certainly knows how to manage a motor-car. His engine roared, and the car and the caravan lurched through the gap, and performed in the field some miraculous maneuvers. Presently they reappeared and turned safely into the lane; and I, listening, could hear no signs of any life at all within the van. I judged, therefore, that my victim was either dead or very dead drunk indeed. I held my peace, and once more the cavalcade proceeded.

At the bottom of the hill I said, "Ann, my fever seems

mercifully to have left me. I feel more or less myself again, and I think, instead of going to Buxton, we'd much better trek for home. I have come to the conclusion that caravanning in England is far too rough and dangerous a life for me. Let's go home. You'll have to get the van mended, anyway; and, to tell you the truth, I have reasons for wishing to leave this place as soon and as quickly as we can."

"Ah, the pigs," said John. "Quite so. I'm with you. Home it is, then."

We fled.

A long hour passed. Presently the light of a new day seeped through our canopy of gray and weeping cloud, and I saw we had left the Arctic uplands of Derbyshire behind us. We were now in a new country, full of fields and woods and little rounded hills. And this rejoiced me, for the abduction of the pig-man had been prompted by the remembered advice of one of Lum Fat's old-time countrymen. "If the gods," wrote that Chinese sage, "deliver the enemy into your hands, but circumstances render it inexpedient to kill him, then I counsel you to transport his person, alive, into a far country, and there cast him forth among strangers." The sage then goes on to say (but this, remember, is a very free translation), "Thus shall you disarm your enemy. Without friends and alone, he will be powerless to contrive mischief against you. And, in any case, you may be pretty sure the strangers will do for the fellow."

Our road ran through a wild secluded valley, where dark wet woods encompassed us, and it seemed to me the transport of my enemy's person had proceeded far enough, and that the time had come to cast him forth. I thought also that I could distinguish faint shouts and thumpings proceeding from the van, and though I was loth that my

victim should forgo any of those nauseous horrors which had afflicted me inside that rumbling tumbril, yet I understood it would be difficult to explain him satisfactorily should he make outcry when we next passed through a town.

"Ann," I said, "I didn't tell you at the time, because you might have argued, and that would have been fatal. The fact is I thought it advisable to shanghai the owner of those pigs. If you listen you can hear him calling now. He sounds weak, but anxious, so I think this is the time and place to maroon him."

All my niece Ann said was "Uncle," but there was a whole world of meaning in her cry. John did a little better. He said, "Suffering Muckings, you *have* done it now!" And he stopped the car with a jerk. The van door slammed, and simultaneously Lum Fat sprang from my lap and scurried to the rear with fierce bloodthirsty growlings. We, too, sprang from the car, and beheld a short, fat, bare-legged figure in a fluttering nightshirt scudding up the road. In full cry astern sailed our misguided lap-dog, giving tongue. Lum Fat, however, is not built for speed. A fifty-yard burst was his limit, and he then sat down and barked. His quarry stopped also. He turned towards us, and raised his hands beseechingly to heaven, and I thought at first that this was a sign of surrender. But it seems he must have been merely calling on the gods to witness his indignities, because he then shook his fists at us viciously, and used some language which, I admit, surprised me.

Ann insists that she merely ran forward with the idea of "explaining," though how and what she proposed to explain is quite beyond my understanding. John says he followed Ann "just to see fair play." Our late guest showed me, though, that he had little doubt as to their intentions.

He judged, I imagine, that the moment for the murder had now arrived, for he uttered a loud cry and sprang into the wood, and vanished.

It was half an hour at least before Ann would abandon the search, and she only gave up then, I think, because John said, "I bet he thinks we mean to kill him when we do find him."

"Poor man," said Ann. "How *could* you, uncle? I wonder if he *will* die?"

"Not him," said John. "No such luck. He'll have our blood first, I bet."

"Yes," I said. "He's a vindictive little beggar. I shouldn't be surprised if he tried to knife me in the back one day. I'll have to look out for him."

John laughed. "Don't you worry, uncle," said he. *"He* won't kill you. Why! you're the goose that's going to lay a lot of golden eggs. All he'll do, if I know the breed, is to sue you for damages. And when I think of all you've done to him, I shouldn't wonder if you found yourself a financial corpse by the time he's done with you!"

. . . . . .

Incredible as it may seem—*John was right!* As I told the Judge in Court: I am a plain man, and I do not understand what all this fuss is about. The fellow refused hospitality to strangers in distress; he grossly insulted my niece; and he then threatened to shoot us if we attempted to extricate ourselves from our predicament. In the countries in which I have lived men have been killed for less. I restrained myself, however. I did not even lay one finger upon the man. I merely left him to stew in his own juice. His troubles were all, obviously, of his own making. And then the authorities of this professedly civilized land interfere and arrest me! I repeat, I cannot understand it. Nevertheless, as

you apparently insist upon it, I will agree to pay for the repairs to the wall and for the loss of the three alleged pedigree pigs. I will pay also for the damage done to the neighborhood by the pigs which escaped, although the amount of this alleged damage is, to me, staggering. I refuse, however, to buy the man a new night-shirt, nor will I pay him the preposterous "personal damages" which he has the audacity to claim. The man has only himself to blame for treading on my niece's dog, and for drinking all my brandy, and then remaining in a drunken stupor inside the caravan. I won't pay him a cent!

That is the speech I made in Court. It is a good speech, I think, and it is all true, too. And, in spite of what Ann says, I mean to stick to every word of it. But I shall leave this benighted country as quickly as I can. It is no place for me, for I am a man who likes to live a quiet life without worries. As I said to Ann, "I've had enough of this insensate civilization. I was a fool to come home at all; and, as soon as the fatuous laws of this savage land let me, I'm going to clear out. I'm going back to Papua and peace again."

And my niece Ann agrees with me.

"I'm very, very fond of you, uncle," she said, "but I think, perhaps, if I were you—I *would*."

## III

## A CONTACT WITH REALITY

Boys, listen here! I'm booked. I thought, maybe, I'd got a chance to see it through; but . . . Well, look at this blasted arm! It's gone black. It's gone bad on me, that's what that means, an' in a day or two it'll start in an' stink. So I'm done all right. The Trade's broke off, too. I can tell that from this bunk, without going up on deck to see. We'll get calms and head winds from now on, an' it'll take this schooner of yours a good month to make Samarai now. So I reckon you'll have to dump me overboard inside a week . . . or less, if this flaming weather holds . . .

I guess, boys, you want to know how I got into that . . . that mess you found me in. I'd have told you before, seeing how you turned up and done your best to get me out of it; but, you see, I'd got a dead partner to explain and eight dead boys besides. And I judged you wouldn't believe the truth, or the police in Samarai wouldn't either. And I didn't want to get my neck stretched. So I meant to keep my mouth shut until I could think up some likely yarn. But now it don't matter what I say, so I'll tell you the truth.

That bloke you found hanging alongside of me was Lane. I struck him in Moresby, eight months ago. He was fresh from Home, and as green as grass, you'd think, because he gave it out all round the beach he'd got the ready cash on him, and was willing and anxious to put it

into a good thing if anybody could show him one. Every crook in the islands was after him right away, of course; but he didn't get skinned, which shows he wasn't the fool he sounded. I was on the beach myself. I'd been poaching trochus that season in the Western Carolines, and the Japs had dropped on to me and took my schooner and every bean I owned. So I put up a scheme to Lane. And don't make any mistake and laugh when I tell you my game was to get him to put up an outfit and have a go for that shell in Nukor lagoon. I know, as well as you do, Pease tried it long ago; and there was Schneider and Billy West since, and lots more. And they all fell down on the job; but I'd a card up my sleeve that looked as if, with a lot of luck, it might do the trick. It *sounded* all right, anyway, so I chanced it and put it up to Lane.

He was a queer lot—sort of gentle and polite and all that, and he wouldn't drink. A regular dude he was. And as soon as he spoke you could see he'd had a good Home education, and wasn't our style at all. But I told him about Nukor and the loads and lashings of shell that was well known to be there, which no one had ever been able to touch. I told him straight what a hell of a place it was, as dry as a bone and so bare that even the cocoanuts wouldn't grow on it. I explained how no one could live on the atoll because there wasn't any water at all, and about the lagoon not having an entrance fit for a schooner. I showed him why anchoring a vessel outside the reef and sending divers into the lagoon in boats wouldn't work, Pease and the rest having tried that, and all of 'em got into a mess. I told him how Pease's schooner'd got blown off-shore in a typhoon, leaving three boats' crews inside the lagoon, and how, after fourteen days, when Pease managed to work her back again, he found all hands dead of thirst, even though, as

Pease said, they'd been drinking each other's blood by the look of 'em. So I said the only way to get that shell was to work it from a regular camp on the island. It had never been tried, because there's no water. But my great idea was to take enough water ashore with us to see us through.

You can grin all you like, boys; but wait a bit. A gallon a day's enough for any man. And in six months I reckoned the two of us, with eight good boys as divers, would get enough shell to pay us hand over fist—let alone any pearls we might drop on to. That means just eighteen hundred gallons of water, or, say, two thousand to play safe. And two thousand gallons ain't nothing to handle, and I reckoned we could manage to get that much landed ashore if we only went about the job the right way. Ten two hundred-gallon tanks would do the trick, and that and six months' grub and eight good divers was all I wanted. So I told Lane, if he could put up the money for it, I'd fix up a passage for the lot of us to Nukor, and then our fortunes was as good as made. It was true, too—*with* luck, of course; but in spite of all I could think of to say about it, I couldn't interest that boy much. When I'd done, all he says is: "Ah! Very interesting, Mister Petrides, I'm sure." Mister, mind you! And from the way he spoke I could see he didn't think much of my game—or me either. It made me sore, and I said so, and I was clearing off out o' that when I'll be shot if he didn't come straight out and ask me if I wasn't the Peter Petrides who'd come through alive out of the *Yankee Girl* affair. I told him plum out I was, and I told him I wasn't scared of anything any man could bring up against me out of that business, and how me doing in Hall and Petersen was all damn lies started by that swine Hacker. For, I tell you, Hall and Petersen died in their bunks, boys. It's God's truth they did. And

what killed 'em both was fever, not me—in spite of all those lies you may have heard. That schooner was rotten with fever, an' those two was rotten with it, too. They went down with blackwater. They was bad, and at last they went crazy, both of 'em,—and knifed each other. Yes. With me trying to hold them both down. That's the truth of that yarn, and so I told Lane. I thought it was all off then, of course, because once a yarn like that about a man starts going the rounds of the beach, it takes a lot of living down. But when Lane heard what I'd got to say, damn me if he didn't seem pleased! "Good," he says, "you're the precise kind of partner I've been looking for, Mr. Petrides. I'll put the money up for this Nukor business, and we'll go there, both of us, as soon as we can."

Well, that seemed funny to me, him taking to it sudden like that; but it didn't worry me long, because, you see, I'd got what I wanted—the run of Lane's pocket. And he had the cash all right. Lots of it. I told him if he wanted a live partner he'd better start staking me right then, because I was just about starved. And he paid up like a man. And he cabled to Sydney right away for the water-tanks and all kinds of trimmings and tucker, an' everything I said we'd need he was ready and willing to pay for. We got four diving outfits, and when I said we'd want tents, he said No. He said if we'd got to live on a place like Nukor we might as well do the thing properly, and I'll be blowed if he didn't order one of them knock-down tin shanties to be shipped to us along with the tanks. It turned up, too, in crates, with the parts all numbered, so all you had to do was to nail the bits together, and there you were with a real house. It had two rooms and a stoep all round, with railings. But I'm forgetting. You saw it yourselves, and I guess it surprised you to find Nukor, of

all the God-forsaken places on this earth, with a slap-up house like that built on the beach.

I fixed up with Burn and MacEacherans to ship us and our stuff to the island. They run a boat up to the Mortlocks every six months or so, so Nukor wasn't much out of their way. But all the same the freight they squeezed out of us was awful, though Lane didn't seem to care. Then I got hold of eight Louisade boys from Teigner. He seemed mighty glad to get rid of 'em, and that ought to have warned me; but they were a tough strong-looking bunch, and, as all of 'em could dive like fishes, that was all I worried about.

We got off in the *Paula.* Old Chris Christiansen was skipper, and at first he took us and our outfit for a joke. When he saw our tanks and the crates with the bits of house in them, he said he'd heard how the land crabs on Nukor were a thirsty lot, and he'd often thought of starting a soda-water factory there himself. By the time he'd got us safely landed, though, on the lee side of that island, with all our water-tanks safely rolled up on the beach above high-water mark, then he saw a light. And before he left he had to admit he didn't see much of anything to stop us, and I could see he was wishing he was in on the thing himself. Anyhow, he promised to call in for us in six months on his next trip north, and then he pushed off. And after that we never saw a sight of anything for five months —till you turned up.

We got busy as soon as the *Paula* left. The first thing I did was to put padlocks on the tanks, and every morning I'd serve out a ration of water to all hands. The house was up inside five days, and when that was done we started in right away with the diving. And you've never seen anything like the shell there is in that lagoon, boys! It lies

thick and close, and it's everywhere. It's not even in patches like you'd expect, but all the bottom's just solid with it. We started diving in six fathoms, and the first day we landed a ton and a half of shell. That was mighty good, and I could see, if we kept it up at that rate, we'd have a little fortune stacked up ready to load aboard the *Paula* when she came back. And after a week or two, when things got organized properly, two tons a day was a poor day's work. You can bet I was pleased at the way my scheme was turning out. I was kind of surprised, too. When I'd broached the proposition to Lane I'd been thinking more of what I could get out of him than what we might get out of Nukor. I'll admit it. But when I found I'd steered us both into a good thing after all, I was tickled to death.

But the queer thing was the way Lane took it. He was in luck, but to look at him and hear him talk, you wouldn't have thought so by a long shot. One day I was blowing about the pile we were making so easy, when, dash me! if he doesn't come out and try to tell me it wasn't the cash at all he was after. "It's not what I'm looking for," he says. "I'm disappointed in Nukor, and in you, too, Petrides," he says. "You've deceived me." Of course, I wanted to know what the flames he meant by that, and then he says, maybe he'd fooled himself. He was mighty high-toned and haughty-like in all his talk, and, blow me, if I could make out what it was he thought he wanted. "If you ain't after the dollars, what in hell are you here for, anyway?" I asks him. And at that he looks at me, sort of sad—and sneery, too. "I'm looking for the truth," he says. "The truth about myself, Petrides," says he. Can you beat it? An' then he gets off a lot of stuff about how he thought that on a place like Nukor and with a partner like me he'd be sure to find what he was looking for. He seemed

grieved because all I'd done was to show him how to make some easy money. Said he might just as well have stayed at home and opened a grocer's shop. I couldn't make him out at all. I thought he must be soft in the head, and I told him so, and then he just looked down his long nose at me, sort of superior, and walked off.

You can see for yourselves what a flaming poor sort of mate a man like that made for me on Nukor. Mooning about, looking for the blooming truth about himself! And thinking I was going to help him. *Me,* mind you! What did the fool take me for? A flaming parson?

Soon after this Lane quit as far as the work went. He just poked about by himself all day, and most all night, too, doing nothing. Just walking around and thinking to himself and sulking. I tell you he was damn poor company, and after about a month of it he began to give me the creeps. "For God's sake, mate," I says one night, "What's eating you? You never were what I'd call cheerful, but you seemed all right enough when we was getting things started and we'd got everything to risk and nothing sure. And now, when it's all over bar shouting and raking in the cash and everything's working out so nice, I'll be blowed if you don't look as if the whole show's busted on you. What's up?" I said. "Are you sick—or what? If you ain't, then it looks to me, from the way you've chucked your hand in, that you're nothing but a born blamed quitter."

Well, boys, somehow that line of talk started him off at last. He hadn't hardly opened his mouth to me for a week before that; but now he began to talk. I guess he must have had a touch of fever on him that night or something. Anyhow, he opened up good and proper. He got all worked up. His face went as white as a corpse, his eyes

went big and shining, and he hit the table with his fists. I didn't tumble to what it was all about, because the language he used was a bit above my head. I've been brought up tough, and a lot of things he got off went right past me. He was in trouble, though, all right. I could see that much. There was a lot of stuff about the scrapping he'd done in France, and I'll say that was the only part of his yarn that interested me. You see I'd had enough sense to keep my hide out of that mess; but I was keen enough to hear about it from any one who'd been through it. And Lane had been in it up to the neck, according to him. I gathered he hadn't liked it. He told me—and the Lord knows why he did—but he told me, with the sweat fair dropping from him, how he'd been in a hole or a trench or something with the rest of his crowd, and they'd been told to hump themselves out of there and go over at the Germans. He told me the bullets were slamming in streams right into the front of that trench, fairly shaking the whole ground when they landed, as if each one weighed a ton, which is interesting, if true. There was lots of shells, too, he says, busting around; but he said it wasn't them but only the bullets he minded. He seemed mighty anxious I should get that clear. It's funny, and I can see him now, sitting there and staring at me and sweating. Anyhow, the long and short of it was, they all jumped out of there as ordered and went on over. But Lane stayed where he was, listening to those bullets plunking into the dirt. And when he told me that, he says, "There! Now you know what I am!" And he worked his face about and swallowed as if he'd got something in his mouth he didn't like the taste of. I thought myself he'd shown pretty good judgment staying in that trench, and I said so. And what do you think that big mut does then? He drops his face on his hands and groans. And "I'm a

coward—a coward!" he bleats. "And I can't stand the thought of it any longer." Yes. A lot of tripe like that he lets out till I judged he'd got a proper go of fever in him and I ladled a good strong whack of gin and quinine into him. After which he talks a lot more slush. Something about coming out to the islands to look for trouble, and see if he could tackle it when he found it. It seems he'd expected great things of me and Nukor in the trouble line; but I took it he was just crying drunk by then, so I didn't listen no more. I lay back on my chair there in the stoep and went to sleep.

And the funny thing is, I hadn't hardly got off before the trouble that Lane said he'd been looking for started. I was woke up by a hell of a smash close to my starboard ear, and the first thing I saw when I opened my eyes was one of our big splitting knives shivering in the wall right alongside my nose. And whoever it was who'd hove it at me had meant business, because the thing had stuck half through that piece of corrugated iron sheeting. I was half asleep still, I guess, because I remember wondering to myself how the flames that knife could have got there. Then there was yells from the dark, and some more knives arrived, and I beat it inside for my gun. The lamp in the stoep was still alight, and that young fool was standing there with his mouth open and his face the color of a stale cod's belly. I sung out to him to douse the glim quick and come in out of it. But he seemed kind of stuck there, so I let go a shot or two at the place those yells was coming from, and made a break and flung that lamp outside.

After that I was mighty busy till the daylight came, for our Louisade boys were out for blood all right. I knew what their trouble was, too. They wanted to get at our water. They'd been grousing right along about what a

little I'd give 'em. You see, I'd judged it wise to cut down their ration pretty considerable on the chance of Christiansen getting held up, or something, and not turning up as soon as we expected. Diving's thirsty work, I know; but I reckon I whacked out enough water to go round if the boys was careful, and it wasn't *my* fault if they swallowed the lot each day as soon as I gave it to 'em. They'd feel powerful dry, of course, later; but to hear them singing out for water all the time, you'd have thought the beggars *washed* in it. They didn't get any more out of me, anyway, and for the last few days I'd noticed 'em looking ugly. I was all set for trouble if they felt like starting it; but I'd never handled Louisade boys before, so I didn't know what swine they could be once they made up their minds for it. It's a fact I didn't give 'em credit for having the guts to go for us or play the game they did. And that's where I made a mistake.

I spent the rest of the night sneaking round and round that stoep, and whenever I heard a sound I'd shoot at it. And then I'd have to shift quick, because each time I fired those beggars would let drive a knife at the flash, and once or twice they very near got me. My notion was to keep 'em from getting into the house and away from the water-tanks, which I'd had stowed underneath the stoep so as I could keep an eye on the things. I knew if those boys once got inside I was done, and you can believe me I kept on the jump pretty lively all night long, and I was everlasting glad when the light came.

As soon as I could see, believe me those boys cleared out of range quick; but the sons o' guns had left it a bit late, and I got two of the swine while they was on the run. When I looked round I got a jolt that brought me up all standing. For I saw the sand below me had all turned

brown, and I knew right away what *that* meant. It was wet! Those blasted boys had got at our water, and when I jumped down to look I found five of the tanks with holes in them where they'd driven a pickhead through the iron, and it only needed five kicks to tell me those tanks was empty. We'd drunk up two tanks by then, and these five wasted left us with only three more to last until Chris got back. And three wasn't going to be enough—not for all of us. Well, that thought rattled me; but after a bit, when I got hold of myself again, I saw what I'd got to do. I'd got to skupper the rest of those boys before it got dark again. They'd got to go. They'd die in the end, anyway, of thirst, whatever I did. If I let 'em live, they'd get me; but if I got them first, there'd be *one* life saved anyway, and it wasn't my fault the way things had worked that that one life would be mine. That's how I figured it out, so I judged I'd better get the job finished and done with at once.

Before I started after them, though, I took a look round to see what they'd done to my partner. You see, he'd never shown up through it all to lend me a hand, so I made sure he'd been done for at the start. I couldn't see him lying about anywhere, and it wasn't till I went inside the house to get some more cartridges that I found the skunk. He was hiding his dirty carcass behind our pile of stores and grub in there! That's where he'd crawled to, the mangy dog, leaving me all alone the whole night to do the scrapping for the both of us. I thought he was dead, too, he lay so still; but, by God! he wasn't touched. I was mad, you bet, when I found that out, and the kick I gave him lifted him clean out of there. Then I told him a bit about himself. I told him he wasn't a white man. I said the only white part of him was his crawling liver, and *that* was striped with yellow streaks. I said a whole lot, I tell you,

and at last the sight of him standing there saying nothing got me so riled up I sailed into him and knocked his face in.

I hadn't got time to waste on him just then, or I don't know what else I'd have done. I knew I'd got to finish the boys while it was light, and it might be a long job, so I filled my pockets with cartridges and started off. I walked along slow, shooting into every bunch I came to, and I flushed those boys one by one, and drove the lot of them ahead of me all around the atoll. They ran like smoke, but I knew they were my meat, and I followed slow and careful. The atoll's that bare there's mighty little cover, and if I kept them going on before me it wouldn't be long before they'd come to the end of the reef. Then there'd be nothing to do but wait for me—or swim. As it turned out, there wasn't no trouble at all, except with the last one. I got four and the sharks got two. The last boy, he'd been our cook boy, because he'd been the only one who could make out to say anything I understood. And when it came to his turn he dodged it for a long time. He jumped behind a lump of rock and kept on jumping. The beggar didn't want to go, and he kept on saying so. "Me good boy," he says, dodging around all the time. "Me *good* boy, master." Like that he went on. But I got him at last, clean in the mouth. And, believe me, boys, those big Colt automatics are man stoppers. The bullet mushroomed and blew the back of his head clean out.

Well, that was that. All done. Makee finish. It put the lid right on the diving business, though. Without boys we was busted, so after that there was nothing to do but sit around and wait for Christiansen. That was a long wait. It was a hell of a long wait. Thanks to you, boys, it didn't last as long as I thought it would, but it was a

good three months Lane and I were all alone there on Nukor. And I tell you, boys, it felt like three perishing years. It wouldn't have been so bad if only I'd had a mate I could have talked to. But Lane was no kind of a mate at all. He never had been from the start; but after things had busted up like they did, I'd have felt better off all by myself, because from then on living with Lane was like having some blooming corpse creeping around the island. He was worse than a corpse, though. You know where you are with a corpse—it's dead and done for, and there you are. But to have to live alone with a bloke who never speaks for weeks and weeks, or even as much as looks at you . . . Well, you try it! I tell you I might not have been there for all the notice Lane ever took of me. He never answered me when I spoke to him even. Gosh! he was a dismal swine! At first I tried to kid him along a bit. "You've come a long way looking for trouble, according to you," I'd say, "and now you've found it, how d'you like it?" I'd tell him things like that to try and jolt him and make him talk. A row and a scrap would have made things feel more natural. But it wasn't a bit of good. Whatever I'd do or say, it wouldn't start him. He'd never speak. Just sit there all day long, thinking. What he'd got to think about, God knows, for I'll be blamed if *I* could think of anything new to think of. He'd just sit there and think and twiddle his blasted eyebrows. That was a trick he'd got, and it used to get me. He was everlasting at it. Twiddle away at his eyebrows, he would, with his fingers. Twiddle and twist and pull at 'em, hour after hour and hour after hour without once stopping. And all I'd got to do was to sit there and watch him doing it. God, how it used to rile me! That—and the silence—and things. Day after day and week after week. It fetched me at last. I re-

member in the end I got to screaming at him. "Stop it!" I'd yell. "Stop it before I rise up and tear the dirty face off you." He'd stop his twiddling then, maybe; but he'd start off again always—twiddling and picking and messing with his face—until I'd sort of burst, and fly at him and maul him good and proper. I had to, d'you understand? I *had* to. And I think if he'd only fought back then I'd have kissed him. But, Lord! he wouldn't fight and make things feel human. Just stood there till I knocked him down, and stayed down till I kicked him up again. The damnedest yellowest cur . . .

I gave it up at last. I never touched him any more. What was the use? I never touched him. But I used to talk. I had to do something, so I told him what I thought of him and what a creeping skunk he was—stowing himself away and leaving me to stall off the boys all by myself. And hiding in that trench, like he'd told me himself, while his mates went over at the Germans. *That* tickled him up. I was mighty glad I'd remembered that. It was the only thing that seemed to put a bit of life into him. So, you bet, I used to let him hear it pretty often. At first, when I started on that lay, he turned white, and he sweated, an' you could see him getting a grip on himself, and I thought I'd struck something at last, that'd make him sit up and take some notice. But not a bit of it! I fooled myself, because, after a bit, as soon as I'd begin to talk he'd clear off. In the end he cleared off to the other side of the atoll, and he stayed away for a day and a night and all the next day.

And when he came back, boys, he was mad. He must have been. Clean off his nut! Because no one but a loony could have played the game he did. He wasn't roaring raging mad, you understand. He didn't come back hollering and raising Cain generally like you might think. No. He

was worse than that. He was quiet—quite quiet—for I was sleeping when he came, and I sleep light, and I didn't hear him. I woke up with the feel of something touching my wrist, and I saw Lane standing over me. "Lie still, Petrides," he says, and I lay still—mighty still. Because he'd a splitting-knife in his right hand, and he looked like splitting me if I as much as winked. I guess I looked scared. I *was* scared—waking up sudden to find a thing like that. And Lane says, "No, Petrides, I'm not going to murder you. But don't move—yet. Wake up and collect yourself," he says. "Take your time," says he. "Because this is going to be a fair fight. Look at your wrist!" he says. And when I saw what he'd done, then I knew, in spite of the quietness of him, that he was mad all right. For he'd got one of the chains I used to fasten the manholes on our water-tanks, and he'd twisted it round his own left wrist and then round mine and snapped the padlock on the whole business. When I saw the way he'd got us fixed I was shook up a bit, and maybe I looked it, for he says then, "I'm going to fight you soon, Petrides. And, *this time,* there's no getting out of it—for either of us. There's no sneaking out this time. I've thrown away the key!"

Then he made me stand up and tells me, when he gives the word, I'm to feel behind me on the table and I'll find a knife the same as he's got. Then we was to fight; but he said he wanted it all fair and proper. He seemed mighty anxious I should think it was all fair. He kept on talking, and I was glad of it, because I'd pulled myself together by then, and the more he talked the more chance there was for me to get him before he got me. He was watching me close, though, and he kept his knife ready while he talked. He said the thing was a test he was putting up on himself, or some such muck. A test of courage he called it. Cour-

age! And all the time I could feel him shaking with funk like a wobbling jelly. But I wasn't listening to him much. I was watching for a chance at him, you understand. But I remember he called me a wolf. A murdering wolf he called me, the loony.

*"All right,"* I says at last. "If you will have it, you must. Triced up this way we'll be like two cats hung on a line. We'll slice each other to ribbons. But you fight fair now," I says. "You've been talking a lot about fair play and all, so now let's see I get it. Don't you go cutting at me till I get hold of my knife. You give me time and play fair," I says, "and then I'll carve you up, my buck, into little pieces. I'll slit that yellow liver of yours. I'll slit your lily-white throat," I says. "From ear to ear—slow. Or maybe I'll rip your guts out." And when I said that I could feel him shake, which was what I was after. He was weakening quick, and I knew it. So I felt behind me, quiet like, for my knife, and I'd hardly got hold if it when he screamed like some girl in a fit, and stabbed me here in the neck and then through my shoulder. I got one back at him in the ribs, and I felt the knife grate on the bones, and it stuck there. So I let go and grabbed for his knife. The first time I only got hold of the blade, and he pulled it through my hand and cut me to the bone. The second shot I got a grip of his wrist and held on. Things was going black on me just then, and I knew I'd got to finish him quick or he'd get me. I'd shoved him up against the rail of the stoep, and before I dropped I gave one shove more —and over he went, backwards. He capsized clean over the railing, and my left arm being chained to him, he nearly took me over with him. Not quite, though. I wish he had. We'd have fallen a good ten feet; but that would have been better than the mess we were in then, with him

hanging down on one side of the rail and me the other.

I must have been hanging there for a long time before I came to, because the blood had stopped running, and it was caked and dried all over me. I was lying on the stoep—at least my legs were; but the rest of me was dragged hard up against the railings. And when I opened my eyes the first thing I saw was Lane's face through the rails, and it was nearly touching mine. He was hanging there full stretch by his left arm. And I was hanging by my arm too. Lane'd pulled it across the rail when he went over, and the jerk, when his weight came on, had snapped the bone. I could see the jagged ends of it sticking through my skin. I was sick then, and I must have passed out again for a goodish while.

What brought me to again was the noises Lane was making. He wasn't talking exactly, only sort of whimpering to himself; but our faces was that close I could hear him easily. "Oh, God, let me die," he was saying. "Oh, God, let me die. Let me die. Let me die." He kept on saying that. Just that. His eyes were shut; but when I told him to stow his noise, they came wide open. He thought I was dead already, I guess. He shut up then for a bit, and we just looked at each other. And I don't want to see a face like that again if I can help it. So close and all. . . . It was chromic. He hadn't much blood left in him, I expect. I must have let most of it out with that stab in the ribs I'd gave him. So he'd turned a sort of dirty green, and his mouth was all queer and twisted. And his eyes . . . I didn't like his eyes, and I wanted to turn my head away, but I didn't dare, because if I even winked the pain in my arm got too much for me.

We stayed that way, looking at each other, for a long time. I don't know how long it was, but it was a long

time. I wondered how long it'd be, and what it was I'd die of. At first I hoped it'd be from the blood I'd lost. Then, after a year or two, I thought I'd most likely pass out with thirst. The thirst I got on me by then was worse than the pain in my arm, and that's saying something. But after a while I forgot all about my thirst, too, because the sun was beating right down on me, and I was in hell—burning. There were the flies, too. Those flies were thick all over me, and the boy was crying again. He shook with it, and at every shake it seemed as if my arm was being torn off me, so I told him to stop it; but he wouldn't stop. He just went on, until, by God, if I'd had a hand I could move I'd have killed him with it. "Stop it!" I says. "Let me die quiet, if you can't. What's the sense in making a noise—now? Are you frightened to die—or what?" That's what I said, and, of course, I didn't expect an answer; but, hang me, if he didn't come right back, almost as if he was sensible. "No!" he says. "No. It's not death—it's *life* I'm frightened of!"

"Life!" he says. And then he groans loud and horrid. And that was all. After that he hung there, quiet. He gritted his teeth now and then, but that was all.

That was all—until the evening. When the sun went down behind the house I opened my eyes—and looked into his, that were only an inch or two in front of me. I remember the flies were bunched all round them—thick, like a lot of little thirsty black sheep drinking out of a pond, they were. Thirsty they were. Like me. And I had to watch 'em drinking. . . .

Pass me that bottle. . . .

You must have let go your hook pretty close inshore, boys. I thought I'd been dead a long time when I heard the rattle of your chain running out. I knew what *that* was

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all right. There's no mistaking the sound of an anchor being let go, even if you are four parts dead. It brought me to again, anyhow. And Lane as well. I saw his eyes go big and staring. He looked as if he was seeing things he didn't like the look of. Then you eased out another fathom of chain, and "A ship!" says Lane, whispering it, as if it was some sort of horrible secret. And then he sings out suddenly so loud I wonder you didn't hear him. "No," he cries. *"No."* And with that he starts tearing with his hand at the knife sticking in his side. His shirt had stuck where the blood had clotted, but he tore at it and tore at his side with his nails, and then the blood came squirting out and ran all over me.

And that's all I know about it. You see, he killed himself. It wasn't me who did it. And I don't remember any more till I found myself aboard here in this bunk. At first I hoped I'd pull through; but now my arm's turned rotten and it's stinkin'. I'm not squealing, boys! but I don't like the thought of going out—not this way. So I'll tell you what you've got to do for me. You'll have to fill me up with liquor, boys. Fill me up. And keep me filled up till I pass out. You'd think I ought to go pretty easy that way?

I'll try it, anyway.

Pass me the bottle.

. . . . . .

Say, boys! If there's any one here knows how to say a prayer, let's hear him say one. Try one on St. Peter. He's my namesake, and you'd think he ought to do something for me. Ask him from me to make the gin hold out until I've got this dying business over.

# IV

## THE PIPE PUSHERS

### I

This is the story of an obscure but potent branch of the British Army. It is, in fact, the saga of that immortal band, known to some irreverent souls as the Pipe Pushers. I propose to sing this saga myself, because it seems no one else will do so, and from what I know of Cornelius I am absolutely certain *he* won't. So the job is obviously up to the other Push Pipe officer, which is me. I wish to make it clear, though, from the very beginning, that my connection with the Pipe Pushers was due solely and entirely to the fact that it was my luck, or rather my fate, to be sharing a billet with Cornelius whilst the great pipe-pushing idea germinated, budded, and finally burst into flower in that distinguished officer's brain. I am anxious that all the credit and glory, and so on, should be heaped exclusively upon the head for Cornelius, where they unquestionably belong.

The Great Pipe Pushing Scheme originated at some time towards the end of 1916. I am sorry I cannot be more definite concerning this important date. My memory for dates is poor; but I do remember that the First Somme Battle was hardly over before I decided that life in the infantry was unsuitable for a person of my retiring temperament, and that shortly afterwards I managed to wangle a transfer to a Tunneling Company, R.E. It was within a month

of this jump of mine out of the frying-pan into the heart of the fire that I underwent a course of instruction at the Army Mining School; and as Cornelius was undergoing that same course of instruction when the divine afflatus affected him, the fact serves to establish the vital date as closely as I am able to fix it.

In fairness to that Army Mining School, I must give to it, as well as to Cornelius, a place in the roll of Fame, because it seems to me Cornelius' brain might not have blossomed as it did had its owner not undergone that unique and stimulating course of instruction. The School functioned near a peaceful village situated some twenty miles behind the line. The scholars slept in billets, messed and conducted the theoretical portion of their studies in two large, ugly, corrugated iron huts, and perpetrated the practical part of the School curriculum in the bowels of an adjacent field, where a maze of dark and narrow tunnels was driven thirty feet below the roots of an unsuspecting crop of sugar-beet. The scholars deserve mention, too. There were about a hundred of them, and they were a queer lot. They were mature men, all of them—quite mature, I should say. The majority had been mining engineers or something or other to do with mines in civil life, and they had gathered at that Army School from all the ends of the earth. They were undoubtedly the toughest lot of men I have ever seen collected together in one place. There were gold men from the Rand, silver men from Australia, copper men from Nevada, tin men from Cornwall and the Straits, iron men from the States and Spain, soft coal men from the Midlands and North, and hard coal men from Wales. And between them they knew all there was to know about sin, wickedness, and mining for the metals, either precious or base.

The Officer Commanding the School was a little Sapper Major who knew nothing about commercial mining, and cared less; but he was a past master at his own job, which was fortunate, because I think if his pupils had become bored, they would, in the face of all the Army Council, have torn that school up by the roots. Instead, they were well content to sit at the little Major's feet and listen most attentively to his discourses on the best and quickest methods of undermining an alert and probably countermining foe and blowing him off the face of the earth. I wish to pay my tribute to the Major. He was a great man.

Cornelius was also a great man. He weighed two hundred and twenty pounds, at any rate, and he hailed from a portion of our far-flung Empire called, as nearly as I can remember it, Zwartruggensdamfontein. He was further remarkable in that he smoked perpetually a brand of tobacco which smelt like a fire in a fish manure factory, and exuded gouts of molten saltpeter that burnt little holes all down the front of Cornelius' uniform. Which was a pity, because Cornelius' uniform had apparently been fashioned by a Zwartruggensdamfontein craftsman, and no openwork embellishments were needed to heighten an effect already sufficiently striking. Cornelius' face well matched the rest of himself. It was big. It was, in fact, the largest front elevation I have ever observed on any human head, and all parts of it, except for those areas specifically exempted by Army Regulations, were covered with a matted growth of extremely ginger hair. In mentioning these matters I am not endeavoring to be funny at Cornelius' expense. Far from it. I am merely trying to show you what Cornelius looked like, so that you may understand how it was that I could sleep in the same room and work in company with Cornelius for nearly a month with-

out suspecting that he was, actually, a genius. It is easy to say, after the event, that I ought to have recognized, in that weird appearance and those strange clothes, two of the hall-marks of genius; but—well, I wish you had seen Cornelius yourself. You would then, like all the rest of us, most certainly have regarded him not as a genius but merely as a joke.

Cornelius has proved that he possessed a unique set of brains; but I am personally inclined to the opinion that his processes of cerebration were normally inclined to be a trifle sluggish. His was the type of mind which needs some external and abnormal stimulus before it proceeds to function, and it is my belief that the stimulus which in his case did the trick was the enforced state of intoxication into which he fell twice daily, in common with the rest of us, on each and every day that Army Mining Course lasted. I am aware that this is a grave charge to make against the authorities, but I repeat it. Twice each day during a period of six weeks, British officers, in numbers approximately one hundred, were forced to reduce themselves to a state of intoxication under orders imposed upon them by the Officer Commanding that Army School, such orders being, I imagine, well known to and approved by the high Army authorities. The state of affairs on which I now throw the light of publicity was doubtless very terrible; but, as one of the victims, I must in fairness add that it was a most pleasant state while it lasted.

The root cause of the whole business was the Major's determination that every officer passing through his School should acquire a thorough and practical knowledge of mine rescue work. Which, I am afraid, involves me in a boring explanation of what mine rescue work is. However, it must be done, so let me gild the pill with silver from the

little Major's tongue. I should mention that the Major invariably commenced his lectures in true pedagogic style, but soon forgot himself and lapsed into his normal manner. His opening lecture, I remember, ran something like this: "Gentlemen (I include, erroneously, I fear, the large and red-haired officer in the rear row with the open mouth and the shut eyes. Oblige me, sir, with the appearance at least of your attention. In fact, dammit, WAKE UP). Er. Hum. When you return to the line, gentlemen, the duty will certainly devolve upon you sooner or later of—er—pooping off a mine under Fritz. That is, the Enemy. The product of an explosion is gas. Expansion. Pressure. You know all about that. One result—a hole in the ground and some Boches squandered or given a rise in life. Another result—you fill your own galleries with gas and do yourself and your own men in. That is, you *will* if you do not listen attentively to what I am going to say. I propose to tell you how you may preserve your lives—but I have no objection if the large and red-haired officer in the rear row goes to sleep again while I am doing so. This product of explosion—this gas, gentlemen—is odorless, invisible, and deadly. You may breathe it without being aware of the fact, after which you become quickly oblivious to all facts and presently die. That is, unless you are quickly removed into the fresh air. The man who does the removing will also be gassed unless he is carrying his own supply of fresh air with him. He can do this, thanks to the mine rescue apparatus which I will now proceed to describe. And I suggest that you give me your close attention while I am doing it, because when you return to the line you are the men who will have to do the rescuing, in view of the fact that you have been through this course. Now this is the apparatus. This cylinder contains oxygen under high pres-

sure. You strap it on your back. This leather bag is connected to the cylinder by a pipe, with a valve in it which controls the flow of oxygen from the cylinder to the bag. You strap the bag on your chest. This tube and mouthpiece leading from the bag you fasten over your mouth. You screw up your nose in this clip, and breathe from the pipe through your mouth. You breathe in oxygen. You breathe out again into the bag. You then breathe in a mixture of oxygen and your own breath. You breathe it out again. You go on doing that. The bag swells up; but the pressure may be relieved by this adjustable exhaust valve. You have thus two valves to play with—the oxygen supply valve and the exhaust valve on the bag. If you open the oxygen valve too much, you blow up your bag and choke yourself. If you open your exhaust valve too much, you loose your air supply and smother yourself. To play on your valves properly and so attain the happy mean requires practice—lots of practice. Each officer present will therefore be provided with an opportunity of practicing with a rescue set for one hour twice daily for the duration of the course. Those of you who may suffer from weak hearts will do well to report to the M.O. at the conclusion of this lecture."

Practical instruction in the use of the rescue apparatus was given us, in squads of twenty, by a Sergeant Harris, who must certainly be given a place in the pages of this history. The Sergeant, like the Major, knew his job. "Fall in, gentlemen," said he. "In two ranks, if *you* please. Not that this 'ere's a parade. It arn't. It's a lesson on 'ow to use rescue sets without doing yourselves in. And I may as well tell you gentlemen, right 'orf, I got *my* rank and job because my trade before the war was *making* these rescue sets. I don't know overmuch about Army ways, and I'm telling you this because I 'ad a little trouble with my last

lot of gentlemen, before they tumbled to it I knew what I was talking about, even if I couldn't talk Army talk! *So* —you fall in two deep, because I wants you to work in pairs. Front an' rear rank men is mates, an' you'll work together and go through your tests together according."

Now, as the Fates would have it, Cornelius was my front rank man. Thus did Destiny mate us.

Sergeant Harris, thank heaven, believed in breaking in his pupils gently. He matured us slowly, allowing us to accustom ourselves to the multifarious horrors of those rescue sets step by step and one horror at a time. We passed our first hour with him breathing through our mouths with our noses screwed up in little vices. This is worse than it sounds. At the second lesson, in addition to wearing our nose-clips, we were gagged with a large and evil-tasting mouthpiece strapped firmly on to our heads. This is much worse than it sounds, and thus gagged one dribbles—surprisingly. The next step was to wear the complete outfit minus the nose-clip, which is not so bad—unless a desire to laugh suddenly overpowers one. This happened to me when I caught sight of Cornelius arrayed in his obscene panoply. The effect of a hearty burst of laughter produced exclusively through the nose is devastating. Also it hurts. The first hour spent gulping down oxygen heavily impregnated with the stench of warm damp leather was a period of pure and unadulterated horror, during which I, Cornelius, and the rest of the squad sweated cold sweats, felt death in dreadful form bearing down upon us, fell into a panic, and tore those stifling clips off our noses. Nor did it cheer us at all when the Sergeant improved the occasion by remarking: "Come, come, gentlemen. This won't do. Nose-clips on again, *if* you please. Supposin' you was down a gas-filled mine *now*. You'd *'av* to keep them clips

on. So, if you take my tip, you'll get used to 'em—while you've got the chance."

It appears one can get used to anything if one has to. Within ten days of our first painful session with the Sergeant the twenty members of our squad could have been seen squatting in a row in a low, hot, narrow tunnel thirty feet under ground. We wore our rescue sets, and the tunnel was dark and filled with a particularly virulent brand of smoke, generated by the thoughtful Harris as a deterrent to the surreptitious slipping off of nose-clips. And the point to note is that we were filled, not with fear this time, but merely with boredom.

It was about this period that I began to notice the effect produced on us by our daily doses of raw oxygen. High spirits became the rule, and appetites grew enormous. We were all, in fact, abnormally stimulated in mind and body by that oxygen to an extraordinary degree. Take my own case, for example. When I entered that Mining School, the fifth proposition in Euclid was a mystery I had never been able to master, and I had a vague idea that a theodolite was either an irregular Greek verb or a geological specimen. I believe I inclined to the latter hypothesis. When I passed out of the School, however, I was the proud possessor of a certificate, in which the Major vouched for me as a "Mining Surveyor, First Class." There is thus no doubt of the power of oxygen to work miracles.

It took a long time before the effects of the gas appeared upon Cornelius, though. Cornelius was, shall I say, an exceedingly solid sort of person. It took a good deal to move him at the best of times, and the doses of oxygen imbibed twice daily by Cornelius had about as much effect on him as upon a lump of cold suet pudding. At the end of one hour spent in swallowing neat oxygen I have seen our

squad of twenty grown men gamboling together like so many playful lambs. No one ever observed Cornelius gamboling, though. When he had to move, he walked—slowly, and each foot came down flat. His mind, I think, moved at a similar gait, and I suppose I know as much about Cornelius' mind as any one. Were we not mates, who worked together and slept in the same room? But even so, I do not pretend to know much about Cornelius. He seldom talked, and during the first month we were together he only really opened his mind to me once. I asked him one night, as we lay in our beds, what he thought of the Major's lecture that day on Mining Strategy and Tactics. Said he: "I do not listen to the man. When I was sixteen I learned to fight in Pieter de Wet's Commando; and my uncle, Jan Niekerk, who is shift boss at the Simmer and Jack Deep, *he* taught me about mining. So what is there that I can learn from the Major?"

It was the day after Cornelius had given me this little glimpse of himself that he received the overdose of oxygen which produced such extraordinary results. The program provided for us that day was in the nature of a "test," devised by Sergeant Harris and the Major with diabolical ingenuity. Working in pairs and encased in our full mine rescue apparatus, we were to descend a 30 ft. shaft and proceed along a tunnel, where we would find a sack containing 120 lbs. of sand and gravel. This sack represented a gassed man, and our task was to carry it out and bring it to the surface. To make the conditions more realistic, the tunnel was filled with smoke, and partially blocked with some timber and sand-bags to represent a "cave in." When our turn came to go down, Cornelius went first and I followed closely. By means of my electric torch I could see Cornelius floundering along the tunnel ahead of me

through the darkness and the smoke. I should mention that the dimensions of the tunnel and Cornelius were almost identical, both being about 6 feet high and 3 feet wide. Cornelius had evidently made up his mind to get an unpleasant job over and done with quickly. He went ahead fast, and presently came to the cave in, a barricade of sandbags 4 feet high. He thrust both arms, his head, and his air-bag through the 2 feet hole and wriggled ahead a little. Then he stuck, because he is decidedly "Dutch built," and he had also his cylinder of oxygen strapped on behind him. I am not quite sure what happened next, and Cornelius refused to tell me; but, judging from the effects, I think I can reconstruct the business. Cornelius, unable to go on, decided to withdraw, but found he could not do so, because, while struggling in the hole, he had neglected to manipulate his exhaust valve, and his air-bag consequently filled itself with gas and swelled up like a balloon. Here, I regret to state, Cornelius got rattled. He should have opened the exhaust valve and released the pressure, but he opened the oxygen supply valve full on instead. This allowed oxygen at a pressure of something like 100 lbs. per square inch to flow into his already overinflated air-bag. There was one channel only by which the gas could escape, and that was through the mouthpiece and down Cornelius' gullet. Cornelius accordingly swelled up too. At the time I was unaware that Cornelius was being blown up like a motor tire before my very eyes. It is true his legs thrashed wildly like a couple of mad flails; but I took all this activity merely as an indication of the strenuous efforts Cornelius was making to get ahead through the hole. The next thing I remember was a loud explosion. (Blanch not, gentle reader. It was not Cornelius, but only his air-bag.) Then I was knocked down and trampled upon as

Cornelius rushed madly past me back to the open air.

Had Cornelius been an ordinary man this overdose of oxygen ought to have killed him. Its first effect, however, was merely to make him very drunk indeed. He climbed up out of the shaft, tore off his rescue set, and kicked it savagely three times around the beetroot field, after which he fortunately collapsed, and we carried him off to bed.

When I went to bed myself that night Cornelius was fast asleep and snoring. In the middle of the night he woke me up by throwing his boots at me. "Wake up!" said he. "I've thought of a thing, man, and I must tell you."

"Go to sleep," I said. "You're drunk, Cornelius, if you only knew it. The M.O. says you're suffering from oxygen intoxication, and you've got to keep quiet. If you do, he says you'll be all right in the morning. How do you feel?"

"I am well and I am not drunk," replied Cornelius. "How should I be drunk when I have drunk nothing at all? The M.O. is a fool. All you English are fools. Listen! When you attack a trench, what do you do? First you tell the enemy you are coming with much firing of guns, and then you attack in front. It was so you fought us in my first fight. I was on Talena Hill, and much afraid because I thought you would attack from the flanks and also from behind us. But no. You came on from the front like sheep. And like sheep we shot you. It was always so when I fought against you. And it is still so now I fight for you. Always the attack in front. You cannot learn. You are fools. I told this to my Colonel before we attacked at La Boiselle. At first he was astonished. Then he told me I was a fool."

"I bet he did," said I. "Who was he?"

"A stiff-necked man and brave, but foolish," went on Cornelius. "He laughed always when he looked at me, and

he called me his old Oom Paul. And now he asked me how it was possible to turn the enemy's flanks when there were no flanks to turn. And I said that we also had no flanks, so that we should sit down and wait until the enemy became foolish and attacked *us* in front. This was truth, and he said it was so, but he said also he could not wait in France until he was old. And he said, 'We may be fools, Oom Paul, but remember, we did take Talena Hill and we did beat you in nineteen-one.' And these being childish words, I did not talk with him any more then. On the next day we fought against the barbed wire and the machine-guns. We fought in the open, there being no cover in that place at all. On the next day we trekked back to rest, licking our wounds. And the Colonel came to me laughing, being pleased because the regiment had taken La Boiselle. 'You see, old Boer,' said he, 'it can be done, in spite of all.' And I replied, 'In truth, it is so. But—have you counted the cost?' Then we stood at the roadside and watched the battalion march past. And when the strength of one company passed us, no more men came. There were no more. *That* was the cost. And I said, 'La Boiselle was not worth it.'

"When the battalion was to go to the line again the Colonel called me before him. He held a paper in his hand. It was a call for officers for the tunneling companies, and the Colonel said that I, being a miner, should transfer myself to them. He said, 'You are too clever for the infantry, Oom Paul. You know too much.' And then he made a joke. 'You do not like frontal attacks,' he said, 'and you cannot go round any flanks in *this* war. But if you become a tunneler you can try going *underneath*.' Then he laughed, and I went away. But I have thought about his words. For it seemed to me that here *was* a way, and that

the Colonel unknowingly spoke truth. To attack from beneath! A new way, and therefore good—if it could be done. I have thought about this for a long time, but never could I find the answer. But tonight, lying here in my bed, I found the answer. So I woke you to tell. Listen! It can be done with pipes!"

I remember getting up at this point and going over to Cornelius and putting my hand upon his forehead. I judged that Cornelius was delirious; but his head was cool, and he seemed quite calm. And he refused to stop talking. "You think I am mad," he said. "But I am not mad at all. Go back to bed, man, and listen. Then you also shall see. And listen well! For with my plan which I tell you now we shall win this war! We shall need pipes—six-inch steel pipes, I think—screwing together in short lengths. We must dig pits, ten feet or twelve feet deep perhaps, in our front trenches, and from these pits we can push the pipes with jacks—screw-jacks or hydraulic jacks—beneath the earth, under No Man's Land, until they lie beneath the German's trenches. Then we must clear the earth core from inside the pipes and charge them with explosives. Then, when all is prepared, we will explode the pipes—and the rest will be quite simple. Tomorrow I will explain my plan to the Major, and here in the root field we will make an experiment. But already I know it is good. It cannot fail. *Do you not see?*"

I do not think Cornelius talked any more that night. I seem to remember that, having delivered himself of his great idea, he then fell fast asleep. But I did not sleep. I lay there thinking of Cornelius and his fantastic scheme. His words, of course, were the babblings of an idiot, and I wondered how long the effects of oxygen intoxication lasted, and felt glad that Cornelius had at any rate not

been violent. I thought how queer it was to hear Cornelius, who so seldom said anything, go rambling on like that. He had been so ridiculously serious, too, with it all. "And the rest will be quite simple," he had said. "Do you not *see?*" I remember saying to myself, "I wonder what Cornelius does see? There's no doubt if only one *could* push a pipe filled with high explosive beneath No Man's Land, it would give Fritz a nasty surprise. Let's see. The thing to do would be to push out our pipe from a spot that enfiladed his trench. You might get your pipe planted under a good length of his line that way. And when you exploded it you certainly ought to kill every one there, and smash up all dugouts and machine-gun emplacements. What a scheme for a raid! By Jove! If only you could do it, Cornelius would be right. The rest *would* be simple. You would merely have to walk across and collect the wrecked trench. The enemy on either flank might make it nasty for you while you were going over, of course, and there'd be the wire to get through. But—wait a bit! Why blow up the enemy's bit of trench only? Supposing that part of the pipe which passed under the wire and No Man's Land were filled with explosive, too. Then when you blew up Fritz, you'd blow a passage through his wire as well—*and,* by gum! you'd blow open a sort of communication trench at the same time, right from our own front trench to his. An attack under such conditions would be absolutely foolproof."

I think the above is roughly the manner in which the possibilities of Cornelius' scheme unfolded themselves in my mind. I remember I got quite excited at last, lying there in my bed, as the beauty of the thing dawned gradually upon me. And the more I thought about it, the better it got. I began to realize the many gorgeous ways in

which Cornelius' push pipes could be used. For instance, if no enfilading position was available, then converging lines of pipe could be pushed out from two separate positions in our trenches. The pipes would meet and when exploded form a V-shaped salient with its point in the heart of the enemy's defenses. And if two pipes were not enough to prepare the ground properly, then use more. Use a hundred! A thousand! Why not? And then I began to dream dreams and see wonderful visions. In fact, before the morning came I envisaged the whole of the British front, with its explosive pipes pushed out before it in a cunningly laid network. I saw, at the stroke of zero hour, the whole German front trench system blown wide open —all of it, from the Channel to Switzerland—a fitting prelude to the victorious conclusion of the war! This was such a splendid vision that I sprang out of bed and woke Cornelius.

"Do you remember what you were talking about last night," I said.

"Of course," replied Cornelius. "My pipes. And today I will tell the Major about them."

"Well, I've been thinking about your pipes all night," I said. "They'd be better than the tanks—if they'd work. But the trouble is, they won't. What makes you think you can push pipes underground like that with a jack, you old jackass?"

And then Cornelius really did surprise me. "Because," said he, "I already have done it." And he then proceeded to relate how, once upon a time, he had taken a contract to cut a drive to connect the bottoms of two prospecting shafts. He had only a rough survey to go by, and was therefore not sure of the precise level and direction in

which to make his drive. But it occurred to him that if he could force a small pipe through the intervening ground from one shaft to the other, and that if the end of the pipe eventually penetrated the second shaft, he would then be certain he was on the right line.

"I used," said Cornelius, "some two-inch pipes. I drove them, one length at a time, through the solid schist with a five-ton screw-jack. It went in as fast as we could work the jack. There was no trouble. In nine hours the pipe came through to the second shaft. Through forty-five feet of schist we drove it, and I tell you, man, it was no trouble at all."

We told the Major all about it after breakfast, and the Major, being, as I have said, a great man, grasped all the possibilities of the thing at once. "It sounds," said he, "like a good thing. But it's sure to be full of snags. In practice it probably won't work, but we'll certainly try it. If you pushed a pipe through solid schist, Potgieter, as you say you did, then we ought to be able to deal with the ground underlying the trenches. The fact that the stuff's mostly clay and chalk is clearly providential. I'm beginning to like this idea. In fact, I'll drive over myself today to see the C.R.E., and wheedle a jack and some pipe out of him. Then we'll try out the thing here."

When the Major returned that afternoon he had acquired a hydraulic jack, twelve pit props, and twenty 10-foot lengths of 6-inch steel pipe. And these things presently arriving in a lorry, the Pipe Pushers paraded for the first time in history, and dumped their material in the middle of the beetroot field. The personnel of the Pipe Pushers, be it noted, consisted of two officers, one N.C.O., and eight other ranks; in other words, of Cornelius, me, Sergeant

Harris, and eighty lusty ex-coal miners disguised as privates, R.E. From such small beginnings do great events spring.

We commenced operations forthwith. Sergeant Harris led off by winning three picks and two shovels from somewhere, and with these invaluable tools we dug a trench. Our trench was 15 feet long, 3 feet broad, and 12 feet deep, and we sunk it through 2 feet of top-soil into 10 feet of solid clay. We assumed that the eastern end of our trench was pointing at the enemy, and placed our jack 10 feet from the east face. We bedded it down firmly on the bottom, and chocked it off with pit props wedged between the jack and some planks (won by Sergeant Harris) placed against the western face. We laid a plank on a clay foundation between the jack and the working face, and leveled the plank by means of a spirit-level, which Sergeant Harris found somewhere. This plank formed a bed and guide, and we placed upon it a 10-foot length of pipe, screwed up the jack, and forced the pipe forward, finding that it cut into the clay as if the stuff were so much cheese. The stroke or reach of the jack was 1 foot. It pushed the pipe forward 1 foot, when it reached its limit. We then screwed back the jack, placed a 1-foot length of pit-prop between it and the pipe, and screwed the jack up again, thus forcing the pipe another foot forward. We repeated this process, using a longer section of pit-prop each time, until the 10 feet of pipe were pushed into the clay. A second pipe was then screwed into the rear end of the first one, and the operation proceeded as before. While the pipes were being pushed forward we removed the core, or filling of clay which they contained, and in the course of our experience we devised a variety of strange implements to enable us to do this. In this connection Sergeant Harris

must again be mentioned in dispatches. He, good man, lured into our trench the village blacksmith, who speedily became engrossed in the proceedings. Thanks to this worthy, the working equipment of the Pipe Pushers was supplemented by one giant chisel, one large auger-like affair, and a spiral wire-bristled brush which resembled a chimney-sweep's chief implement. We attacked the core with these weapons, screwing them on to lengths of 2-inch pipe and using the pipe as a handle. We battered at the core with the chisel, screwed and scraped out the fragments with the auger, and cleaned up with the brush. Sometimes, if we were lucky, the auger got a grip on a length of clay core and drew the whole thing out intact, exactly like pulling a long cork out of a bottle. As the push pipe lengthened, so did we extend the handle of our core-extracting tools, screwing on additional lengths of 2-inch pipes, precisely as a sweep does when cleaning a chimney.

Working like this we found we could push our pipe forward at an average rate of 5 feet per hour. In that first experiment we pushed 100 feet of pipe and cleared it of its core in twenty-six working hours, and the thing showed so much promise that even the Major began to get excited. Said he, "We'll need a lot of explosive to fill that pipe, and I don't quite see how I'm going to get hold of it. So I think I'll try and get the General to come and have a look at this. If we can impress him, the problem of supplies should be solved."

In due course the General turned up. I do not know if he was impressed. He watched us push 2 feet of pipe, and then he said "Humph" and went away. But if not impressed, he must, I think, have been at least intrigued, otherwise I am unable to account for the 500 lbs. of ammonal which presently appeared. Ammonal, thank good-

ness, is not by nature one of those touchy and irritable explosives. You can drop the stuff and knock it about and treat it generally in a careless and offhand manner without causing it to react violently, as will, for instance, guncotton, which possesses a tricky and most artistic temperament. Our ammonal was packed in little canvas bags, and we found that by rolling the bags between two boards we could make them assume a sausage-like form ideal for stuffing into the push pipe. We fitted a wooden head to our 2-inch pipe, and using this as a ram-rod we forced our ammonal sausages one by one up the pipe as far as they would go. We filled about 50 feet of the pipe with the 500 lbs. of ammonal, and in the last bag we placed a stick of blasting gelatine and a detonator attached to a length of insulated electric fuse. This fuse led back through the pipe into our trench, where it could be attached to an electric exploder when the time came to blow up the charge. Then we filled up the rest of the pipe with clay, tamped it in firmly, and rested from our labors. The first push pipe mine was laid and ready!

I regret to state that Cornelius, if left to himself, would probably have then ruined the whole business. "We will now blow," said he, "and show that it is good." Fortunately Sergeant Harris intervened. Said he, "Excuse *me,* sir, but God bless your 'eart, don't you go and *waste* it. If you blow it now, all we'll 'av to show is a hole in the ground—an' no one ain't going to get excited about that. You take my tip, sir, and wait an' get the General and all here. An' *then* fetch 'em with the fireworks." And the Major, approving these words of wisdom, the Pipe Pushers perforce waited, itching with a great impatience, while the Major pulled the strings.

We waited for three days, but the audience which then

assembled to witness our demonstration was, it seems to me, well worth waiting for. It consisted of one General Officer Commanding an Army Corps and his Staff, two Staff Colonels, one Staff Major, and two Staff Captains, all from G.H.Q. itself. "Gawd!" said Sergeant Harris as he observed the Major conducting these mighty personages towards us across the beet field. He dropped into the trench and I followed him, because I believe in taking cover when danger threatens, and that was my first experience of a mass attack by officers of the General Staff. Cornelius, however, was made of sterner stuff. While I cowered at the bottom of the trench, Cornelius stood his ground, and gazed unwinkingly at that glittering array of scarlet and gold advancing upon him. He listened to the Major explaining the details of his Pipe Pushing Scheme; and when he was indicated as its author, he scratched his fiery head and favored the assembly with a grin. "With my pipes we win the war," said he. The assembly then also grinned. To tell the truth, the assembly burst out laughing. Said Cornelius, "Now, General, if you permit, I will blow my pipe. Then you will see it is good, and I do not think you will laugh any more." He then jumped into the trench, and pressed down on the handle of the exploder.

I remember a mighty "THUMP," as if some angry giant had belabored the quaking earth. I remember most of the trench falling in upon me, and I remember a glimpse of an atmosphere thick with flying beetroots, staff officers, and lumps of clay. And I shall not forget in a hurry a red and horrid fragment, raw and bleeding, that fell with a thud at my feet. I prepared to be sick, but recognized in time that the thing was merely a lump of lacerated beetroot, and scrambled out of the trench. I viewed the stricken field. In the middle of it gaped a crater 50 feet long and

10 feet deep. On its brink stood Cornelius, the Major, the Corps Commander, and Sergeant Harris. They looked pleased. Scattered about amongst the beetroots crouched the disconcerted members of the General's Staff. They bore all the hallmarks of having recently undergone a very harrowing experience, and they did not look pleased. At the far end of the field stood the School's one hundred mature and hard-bitten pupils. They seemed to me to rock strangely on their feet. They bent double, and their bodies heaved as if in pain, and they seemed to cling desperately to each other. It was some little while before I understood that they were laughing.

I approached the group at the crater's edge, and I am glad I got there in time to hear the General. Said he, "A fine show. I congratulate you. Devastating! Absolutely devastating. Pop off a thing like that under a trench full of Huns, an they'd vanish. Simply vanish. Just like those boys of mine did. *Did* you see 'em go? Blown clean out of the field! But I think I showed 'em the old man can still stand being shot over, what? Splendid! It'll devastate 'em. It's been a real good show, by Tophet! I'm pleased with you. And I'll give you a chance to show what you can do in the line. I'll arrange it at once. And now let me go and tell my boys what I think of 'em. Rattled, they were! Perfectly rattled, by Gad! And by a barrage of bally beetroots!" Saying which, the General patted Cornelius on the back and trotted off chuckling.

Said Cornelius, "Almachty! *There* is a fine man. I did not know. If we have more Generals like him we win this war after all. When they laughed at me I became angry—but I am glad I did not hurt *him*."

Four days after the successful demonstration of their powers the Pipe Pushers received orders to carry out their

first offensive operation against the enemy. "The scheme seems to be," said the Major, "for you to prepare the ground for a raid the Nth Brigade are making. Zero hour is two A. M. next Monday, which gives you four days to get ready. They're sending one company over without any artillery preparation whatsoever. The General says he is relying on you to do all the preparation. He wants you to blow up two hundred feet of the Boche trench, and then the infantry go over and pick up the pieces. The General says he needs some prisoners for identification purposes; but I think his main idea is to give you a chance to show what you can do. I may tell you the General seems to be the only person at Headquarters with any faith at all in your pipes. Every one else laughed at the idea or condemned it outright. And I hear the infantry people are dead set against the Push Pipes, and have definitely asked to be allowed to make the raid on their own. So you see, you've got to make good this time, or I doubt if you'll get another chance. I've been up the line myself, and examined the position, and I think you might, with luck, bring the thing off. The trenches there are no more than a hundred feet apart, and you'll find there is one place from which you can enfilade about two hundred feet of the enemy's firing trench. That gives three hundred feet of pipe to push. The ground is soft clay over chalk. Practically made for the job, in fact, except that I noticed some flint bowlders in it which may give you a little trouble perhaps. You will go up the line tonight, taking Sergeant Harris and your eight men, and I've arranged for a lorry to take you, together with three hundred feet of pipe, the necessary timber, and a jack. You will report at Brigade Headquarters, and they will provide a guide and a carrying party. You'll be ready to start pushing by daylight tomorrow, I should think. To-

morrow's Friday, and that gives you three clear days. The Tunneling Company in the sector have been ordered to ration your men and provide all the ammonal you may need, and Battalion Headquarters will give you all details concerning the raid. You will, of course, coöperate closely with them throughout. Here are your orders and a plan of the front lines—and that seems to be about all I can do for you. So—good luck!"

Behold now the Pipe Pushers, marching on to war—or, rather, struggling up a narrow, slippery communication trench in the black dark. Cornelius follows the guide and I follow Cornelius. And behind us trails a staggering line of men bearing heavy burdens and cursing. Sergeant Harris brings up the rear, because it is much simpler to drop in the mud such awkward impedimenta as pit-props, planks, and pipes than to insinuate them along a twisty overcrowded trench in the dark.

It seems to have been the fate of the Pipe Pushers to be unpopular from the first. At Brigade Headquarters we were treated with hauteur, derision, and scorn; our carrying party quite obviously hated us; the people who encountered our jack, pipes, etc., in the trench most violently disapproved of us; and when at last we arrived at the scene of our operations in the firing line we found we were far from being welcome. Said the Company Commander, "My God! What's all this? You can't dump that junk in my trench. I won't have it. Go away. Who *are* you, anyway?"

"The Push Pipe Party," replied Cornelius.

"Oh, you are, are you?" said the Company Commander. "Then you push off, my son. And take your damn pipes with you." He then flashed an electric torch on Cornelius' face, cried out in a loud voice, "Perishing Muckings! If it isn't old Uncle Oom Paul!" and collapsed upon the fire-

step. "Oh, don't—*please* don't tell me," he went on, "that *you*'re the maniac they've sent to mess up our raid with a drain pipe!"

And then I heard Cornelius groaning in the dark. "Almachty!" he cried, *"it is my old regiment!"*

II

Cornelius' old regiment boasts a list of battle honors as long as my leg. Its unofficial name is "The Bull Heads," because of the regimental tradition that the best way to defeat an enemy is to go for him bull-headed and toss him away. The Bull Heads' pet weapon is the bayonet; they regard barbed wire and bombs as unsporting, and look with scorn upon such accessories to infantry action as tanks and machine-guns. As this will be read by respectable people, I cannot give you the Bull Heads' views on push pipes and Pipe Pushers, which is a pity, because the Bull Heads' views, though devastating, were diverting. And I know what I am talking about, because I had to sit and listen to the Bull Heads expressing themselves for twenty-three consecutive hours. During that time each single man in the battalion took trouble and pains to get himself to the fire-bay in which we were working in order to express himself on us. "C" Company's Sergeant-Major, I remember, was good; while No. 9 Platoon Commander was even better; and the R.S.M.'s discourse was, I think, a most masterly effort. But how—oh! *how* I wish I could give you the imperishable words let drop into the Pipe Pushers' trench by "C" Company's Sanitary Orderly.

The unusual amount of traffic flowing into our trench inevitably attracted the enemy's attention, with the result that all that day we worked under a barrage of light shells

and heavy trench-mortar bombs, which made life almost as uncomfortable as the hail of scorn and jeers directed upon us by the Bull Heads. But in spite of all this sound and fury the Pipe Pushers worked on. We arched our backs and pushed—furiously. For we were angry. We meant to show the Army (especially the Bull Heads) how to win the war. Our answer to the scoffers was, "You wait and watch us." We meant to blow sky-high as many Germans as we could get at, not because we hated Germans particularly, but because by this time we hated those confounded Bull Heads, and we proposed to show them what the Pipe Pushers really could do. By six that night we had pushed 70 feet of pipe clear under No Man's Land, and we knew then that, unless some accident befell us, our 300 feet of loaded pipe would be ready and waiting well before zero hour.

Said Cornelius, "All goes well. Go you now to Battalion Headquarters and tell the Commanding Officer that our mine will be ready—on time."

"Hang it all, Cornelius," I said, "*You* go. You're the officer in charge, and you ought to go. I've heard what the battalion think of us, and I've had enough. I don't want to hear the Colonel."

"Yes," replied Cornelius, "I am in charge, and so I tell you to go. The Colonel he laughed at me always. Now he will laugh more, and I shall become angry. Go you, then. Give him greetings from his old Boer. Tell him I have not forgotten. There are no flanks in this war. No. In front, waiting for the Bull Heads, is the wire, thick as a forest of wachtenbitche thorn. But tell him I, Cornelius Potgieter, will clear the way for the Bull Heads. Tell him that. Go!"

I went; but I toned down Cornelius' message consider-

ably, because I am frightened of all Colonels; and the Bull Heads' Colonel, when I crawled into his dugout, regarded me as an M.F.H. might regard a vulpicide.

"I have to report, sir," I said, "that our work is going ahead more quickly than we estimated, so that the pipe-mine will be ready for firing before zero hour. That is, unless they dump something on top of our jack first, sir. They've been feeling for us with heavy Minnies all day."

"They have?" said the Commanding Officer. "Ah! then perhaps there's a chance yet. Not that I wish you people any harm, of course; but the Corps have forced these confounded pipes of yours on to us, and, I feel it in my bones, they'll be the undoing of our raid yet. So you'll understand I'll be glad to see 'em put out of action. May heaven forbid that I should interfere with the G.O.C.'s orders; but what I say to you, young man, is this: We go over at two A. M. on Monday whether you explode your filthy pipes or whether you do not, and all you have to see to is that you don't blow any of my men up. It really is too bad of the General to saddle this—er—sewage scheme on to the Bull Heads."

"Very good, sir," said I. "But I hope you will think a little better of us when the raid's over. Captain Potgieter told me to report that he's going to blow open a communication trench right across No Man's Land, destroy the wire in front, and put out of action every man in the trench you are going to attack. Surely that ought to help a bit, sir?"

"Ah! Potgieter. Yes," said the Colonel, smiling grimly. "So they told me. I think I'll come up later and make sure that old Boer doesn't dish the lot of us with his slim tricks."

"Did you tell him?" asked Cornelius when I returned.

"I did," I said. "And he's coming up later to bite you. He regards us as a joke. They all do. And I gather from some pregnant remarks the Adjutant let fall that the Bull Heads intend to savage us if we dare to kill any of their Boches. They say they're making this raid to get identifications—and they want live ones. As far as I can make out, their plan was to go over in the dark, wire-cutters in one hand and pick-handles in the other, collect all the Fritzes they could find, and then get back without making any noise, fuss, or bother. So they naturally think that our mine pooping off at the start of the proceedings is bound to jigger the whole show."

Cornelius gave vent to something that sounded like "Verflootundhochnamalia," which seemed to do him good. "The frontal attack as always," he then growled. "He will *not* learn, that man. But, this time, I will teach him."

The Pipe Pushers worked on. A little after dark we had some trouble. The pipe jammed, and it felt as if the end had run against some hard substance, probably one of those flint bowlders the Major had warned us about. There being nothing to do except try and push past it, we fitted a lever to the handle of the jack, and all hands hove mightily upon it. The pipe buckled under the strain, twanged once like a banjo string, and suddenly moved forward. The Pipe Pushers breathed again. We had evidently forced our pipe past the obstruction, and from then on for the rest of the night we had no more trouble, the pipe, in fact, after this incident, appearing to go forward more easily than ever.

By 4 A.M. we had pushed out 120 feet of pipe, and Sergeant Harris was hard at work removing the core. "Go easy," I warned him. "Remember you're working now right under the enemy's trench. You're only two or three

feet beneath his trench boards. It won't do if he hears us."

"It won't!" said the voice of the Bull Heads' Commanding Officer from out of the darkness above us. "Although I think, from the way they're behaving, they know all about you already. I don't quite like all these lights they're sending up, and I mistrust this unusual trench-mortar activity. When I had the honor of being your Commanding Officer, Potgieter, I remember you used to lecture me on the superiority of Boer over British tactics. Well, if it's your idea to knock at the enemy's door before you attack him and tell him you're coming, you seem to have succeeded perfectly."

"Ah! You laugh at me still, Colonel," replied Cornelius. "But, wachtenbitche! Our people have a saying that he laughs the loudest who laughs last. So—we shall see!"

At this speech from Cornelius, visions of court-martials and shootings before dawn rose up before my horrified eyes; but the Bull Heads' Colonel must, I think, have had a soft place somewhere in his heart for old Cornelius, because all he said was this—

"*Our* people, too, have that same saying, old Boer. I think it is a very true one."

And with that the Bull Heads' Colonel climbed to the fire-step above us and looked out across the wire. For the dawn was breaking, and the Bull Heads, as their custom is, were standing-to. I climbed up also, to join that line of silent men who watched and waited so intently for what the new day might bring to them. The first faint gleamings of the light sifted across the eerie ground between the trenches, revealing nothing. Then suddenly the light grew —and we saw. We saw, reared in the middle of No Man's Land, an incredible pillar! A mystic column. A long, thin stalk that sprouted from the ground and rose up astound-

ingly 60 feet into the air. It drooped, as if weary, and it wavered drunkenly in the little dawn wind. And from its top appeared, twirling, the head of a chimney-sweep's broom.

I stumbled backwards at the sight, and fell. And in my ears arose, above the thunder of the guns, a crash and a rumble and an exceeding great roaring.

It was the Bull Heads—laughing!

## V

## A SLEEPING DRAFT

THE ship was pushing steadily through the solid blackness of a night as stifling and oppressive as only a night in the doldrums can be. It was time for me to turn in; but I stood in my pyjamas outside my cabin door and eyed that oven-like interior with loathing. Its steel walls blazed raw-white in the glare of the unshaded electrics, and I knew the engine-room bulkhead beside my bunk was hot enough to burn the naked hand. A multitude of fat but active cock-roaches disported joyously in this salubrious environment; and a sour nauseating whiff from the gaping mouth of a hold ventilator bore witness that our cargo of sugar was heating. These things caused me to think regretfully of that clean and spacious liner's stateroom, with its whirring fans, the booking of which I had abandoned so recklessly at the bidding of my friend, the master of this unclean and ancient tramp. Across a gap of years we two had met again on the steps of the shipping office at Port Louis, and, after explanations, he had suddenly slapped me on the back and cried, "What! going Home in a gilded steam-hotel? Why, *we're* sailing for London River the first thing in the morning. Now, why not come with me?" He assured me that I should thereby see life, save money, and be some one for him to talk to; and I had accordingly saved my money, and was now seeing life—as it is lived aboard a strictly utilitarian and economical tramp upon the high seas. I was

finding it a life chock-full of interest—and discomfort.

There were compensations, though. For instance, "Passengers are not allowed on this deck" is a notice which bars one from the most desirable portions of any passenger ship; but this s.s. *Wisby Hall* was mine own, all of her, to do as I liked with. So I turned from that distressful cabin and climbed the ladder to the lower bridge in search of a draft of air. A cane chair creaked, and out of the darkness came the Skipper's voice. "Ah!" said he, "I can't sleep either. I think this is the coolest spot in the ship; but, if you want to get clear of the smell, the crow's-nest is the place."

"I'll never touch sugar again as long as I live," I grumbled. "It's making me feel sick, and I can't sleep. I only wish I'd known the ship was going to smell like this before I joined her. You ought to have told me, and then I shouldn't have come."

"Yes, it's pretty bad now it's started to sweat," said the Skipper. "It's a nasty cargo to live with is sugar—but I've known worse."

"I don't believe it," said I; and I fear the ill-humor caused by my bodily discomforts showed a little in my voice.

"Oh! You get used to sugar in time and don't notice it," said my host soothingly. "There are worse cargoes—dye wood, for instance. I loaded a cargo of logs once at Puerto Caballos, and they fairly crawled with scorpions and spiders—not to mention snakes. You'd find 'em in your bunk. It was nasty. But even that lot was better than a live cargo."

"Logwood sounds lively enough for me. But what do you mean by a live cargo. Cattle?"

"Well, cattle are bad, too. So are sheep. The smell from them's so bad sometimes it almost blinds you. Really blinds you, I mean. It's the ammonia in their droppings, I think."

"Lord!" said I, "I'm beginning to feel glad we've only got sugar aboard."

"Yes. But I wasn't thinking of cattle," went on the Skipper. "It's human cargoes I don't like. Passengers are bad enough, and I wouldn't command a liner for any money. But it's a cargo of coolies we once had aboard this ship that I'm talking about. Chinese they were—eight hundred of 'em—and they were the limit."

The Skipper paused for a little, and presently he surprised me by sighing profoundly in the darkness. I held my peace, and waited. But nothing happened, so I became diplomatic. "They must have been bad," said I, "if the thought of them makes you feel like that still."

*"Bad!"* said the Skipper, as if the adjective hurt him. "Bad. Why, they were, without a doubt, the very toughest gang of roughs on record. If you sweep up the scrapings from the jails of all China, it stands to reason you are going to get a precious collection of bad eggs. And if, on top of that, you go to work and sort out the worst specimens from your collection, you can then be certain you have achieved a most notable concentration of thugs. Well—that's how my cargo of devils was raked up."

"But how—it doesn't seem reasonable," I exclaimed.

"Maybe not; but it happened anyhow," said the Skipper. "Very reasonably and simply, too, if it comes to that. You see, the gold mines on the Rand ran short of labor, because the simple Kaffir is a wise man, and he won't work unless he has to. He'd work until he'd earned enough to buy a wife to work for him, and then he retired smiling. The mine owners were silly enough to offer higher wages, thinking they'd attract more labor that way, I suppose; but the result was, of course, that the unmarried boys came in and earned their wife-money in less time than ever, and

then *they* retired happy. After that the mines were in the cart—until somebody thought of recruiting labor in China. They went to the Chinese authorities for permission to recruit, and, you can believe me, the authorities were delighted. You know what the beggars are. They jumped at the chance. 'Yes,' they said. 'You bet. And, what's more, *we* will supply the men. You send your ships and we'll fill 'em up with coolies'—at so many dollars a head. You note the graft? The result was that, when the ships turned up, they just emptied their jails into them, thus getting rid of their criminals, saving the expense of their keep, and making an honest penny or so for themselves at one sweep. You can't beat a Chinaman at that sort of game. Well, that's how the dregs of China came to be dumped into the Transvaal. I've heard they were fine workers, though. They'd drill two holes in a shift against a Kaffir's one, and the mine people were mighty pleased with 'em. They'd escape from their compounds every now and again, of course, and then there'd be murder, robbery, and rape round and about Johannesburg for a bit. I have heard, too, that it paid to be popular with 'em if you worked below ground, on account of a playful habit they had of signaling 'Man coming' on the engine-room bell, and then sending up your severed head in the skip. They were tough, all right, but they did put their backs into their job, and the miners were mighty sorry when they had to send them all back again.

"You remember that Chinese slavery fuss in the Home papers? I never quite got the true hang of it myself; but it seemed to me the mine people were happy, and so were the coolies. Apparently the Home politicians weren't, though; so those coolies had to be shipped back again. Some of them didn't want to go at all, and they made

trouble. They were mostly men who knew they'd be shot into prison the moment they landed in China, so you can't very well blame them for kicking. And I must say I don't blame the Chinese authorities either for wanting to make sure of those birds as soon as they arrived, for they weren't the kind of lads any authorities, even Chinese ones, would care to have loose about the country. The Peking Government didn't want 'em back at any price, and I believe they said so officially. In any case, what with one thing and another, the worst bunch of the lot, about eight hundred of 'em, were kept back till the last ship-load; and then, my luck being out as usual, this ship was chartered to load that unholy gang at Durban and take them to Ching-Wan-Tau. That's how I got the most infernal mob of toughs on record loaded on to me. I told you that at first, and you didn't believe it; but, as I said, the explanation's simple."

"I see," said I. "They must have been a handful. Did you have much trouble?"

"I did," replied the Skipper. "And I didn't have long to wait for it either. In fact, it started the moment the charterers took over the ship at Durban. They had to fit her up, of course, and they played Old Harry with her. Will you believe it, they actually pierced the 'tween-deck plating in twenty-six different places—for latrine pipes! The terms of the charter-party allowed them to do pretty well as they liked with the ship, you see, and left me powerless to stop 'em. They fitted the after 'tween-decks solid with wooden bunks, and ran up four tiers of berths in Numbers Three and Four lower holds. They even built a hospital on top of the wheel-house aft; but, except for fixing a row of rice cookers the size of young donkey-boilers along both sides of Number Two hatch, they left the fore end of the ship alone. Then they filled the main hold with stores, and put the ship

down six inches by the head, and I went to the Agent and protested. I raised Cain. I said they'd made the ship unseaworthy, and the beggar just laughed at me. He said that six inches out of trim wouldn't hurt, and, anyhow, I'd have to lump it, because the fore part of the ship had to be kept absolutely clear of all coolies. 'If we were to give 'em a free run of the deck,' says he, 'it wouldn't be long before they'd take charge of the ship. You'd find them roosting in your bunk, Captain, and they'd certainly make trouble with your Lascar crew. They're dangerous men,' says he. 'They aren't safe, and that's a fact. And that's the reason we mean to make the after end of your ship a sort of prison for 'em. We're going to fit an eight-foot iron grill right across your deck amidships, and if you take my advice you won't let any of them get forward of it once you're out at sea.' Then he finished off by telling me that, instead of making difficulties, I ought to be grateful to the charterers for thinking of my safety and comfort—so I got the worst of it. That was the first time I'd heard I was going to ship a dangerous cargo, and I remember I went straight out of that office and did something I'd never done in all my life before. I went and bought a revolver.

"When I got back aboard I had another surprise. I found the charterers had appointed a man to take charge of my cargo for me! That's just what it amounted to, and you can bet I didn't like it. And I knew, as soon as I saw the fellow they'd put in charge, that I shouldn't like him either. He was the sort of man I haven't got any use for. Finch was his name. A great big bucko of a man, whose only qualification for the job, as far as I could see, was that he could talk Chinese. He seemed to think at first, too, he was going to run the ship, and I had to show him right away there was only one master aboard her—and that was me. He'd

brought a dozen or so assorted Chinks along with him—cooks and 'orderlies' he called 'em,—and he comes along worrying me about where he was to stow them. So I told him to run away and ask the Mate, and I could see by the look he gave me that I'd surprised him.

"Next morning our cargo arrived alongside—a train-load full; and it took Finch all day to get those coolies aboard. It seems he wasn't taking any chances. He made the shore people march the beggars up our gangway one by one, and as each man reached the deck, Finch and his boys went through him. They did the job properly, too. They stripped every one down pretty well naked, and searched 'em and looked through their bundles of duds and things. I could see those Chinks didn't like it a bit; and whenever Finch came across a knife or a bit of opium or something, they'd give him some mighty dirty looks. Not that Finch cared, bless you. He stood there looking as fierce and tough as he knew how, and every now and again he'd touch up any boy that showed signs of jibbing with his sjambok. And a sjambok's a nasty thing to get hit with. It's a strip of dried rhino hide, and a smack with one on the bare skin will draw blood quick if you aren't careful. And Finch wasn't careful at all. I didn't like it; but that wasn't the time or the place to interfere—so I waited.

"The last man in the procession came up handcuffed between two Kaffir policemen. He was a big man, but he didn't look particularly dangerous to me. In fact, he had rather a fine-looking figure-head on him—sort of quiet and sad and gentle. But Finch gets into a great state about the beggar, and he comes bawling to me wanting to know where he is going to stow him. 'The swine's dangerous,' says he. 'He's murdered three men down the Rhineveldt Deep, and the only reason his neck isn't stretched for it's

because they badly wanted him for some other devilment in Tientsin. He'll get *his* all right,' says he, 'when they get him ashore at the other end; but what I want to know is, what'll I do with him now?' 'Oh, put him in your bunk,' says I, 'and good luck to him.' And with that I laughed, and went up on the bridge and got the ship under way."

"You don't seem to have liked that man much," said I. "What did he do with his murderer eventually?"

"Oh, shackled him to a stanchion down Number One hold," went on the Skipper. "It was the Mate's idea, and the man was nice and snug down there, and well out of the way of everybody. And as for not liking Finch—well, he wasn't my style; but he had his points, and I have to admit it. I had him up to my cabin the first night out, and went for him about the way he was manhandling the coolies. It was my idea to go easy with them and leave 'em alone and not stir up trouble, and I said so. I told him to take a close reef in that sjambok of his, or one night, as likely as not, he'd be getting his throat cut, to say nothing of the throats of the rest of us white men aboard. I gave him beans, I tell you.

"And then, when I'd quite done, *he* started. He told me some things that surprised me and made me feel mighty thoughtful. He said he mightn't know much about ships, but he did know how to handle coolies, and that if I thought we would ever get to Ching-Wan-Tau unless he put the fear of death into those Chinks and kept it there, then I was an old fool. Yes. That man sat there in my cabin and called me an old fool! And I sat and listened to him. I had to, for, you see, he was speaking the cold truth—and it frightened me. I knew we had a bad crowd aboard all right, and that if they wanted to scupper us they wouldn't have much trouble doing it; but I hadn't worried much,

because I never seriously thought they'd *want* to scupper us. But according to Finch, that was just what they were almost sure to do. Says he, 'There's over eight hundred of 'em, and they're all bad; but there's one gang a darned sight worse than the rest. They're all due for the clink as soon as they get ashore; but some of them are due for more than that. They won't live long once their police get hold of them —and they know it. And if you were in their place, what would *you* do? Why, you'd get hold of the ship and run her in somewhere handy along the China coast and clear out. It stands to reason; and it's my firm belief that's what they'll try to do. And as for getting hold of this ship—it's easy. What does the crew amount to? There's you and me and your three Mates and the four engineers. That's only nine of us whites all told, not counting the Doc., who's a half-caste Macao Portuguese, as far as I can make out, and not to be relied on. And you know better than I do what your Lascar crew is worth; but I bet, if it comes to a scrap, that they'll lie low and try and save their skins—and I don't blame 'em.'

"Well, that was bad enough; but as soon as he had got me pretty near frightened to death with talk like that he started off again on a fresh tack. 'Now, here's another thing', says he. 'These birds don't get paid their wages till they get to Ching-Wan-Tau. *That* was a little scheme arranged by our Repatriation people. When I was wangling this job out of them in Pretoria they tried to tell me this bally scheme of theirs was a better insurance against trouble aboard the ship than the armed guard I was asking for. According to them, the coolies were all going to be good boys, because they knew if they weren't they wouldn't draw their pay. That's why we haven't got a guard. Can you beat it? The Chink authorities jumped at the idea, of

course. They get the handling of the cash that way, and a fat lot of it our coolies are likely to see. The trouble is, the beggars know it. They know they haven't a hope of ever touching a bean of their money. And d'you think that's going to make nice good boys of 'em? You bet it isn't. Why, they're ripe for trouble. And the worst of it is that making trouble's worth while for some of them. Knowing what they know, each man must have drawn an advance before they left Jo'burg. Wanted to make sure of getting something, I guess. Anyway, when I was searching them I found nearly every man jack had from five to ten pounds stowed away on him. It doesn't sound much; but it means there's from six to eight thousand pounds loose aboard this ship; and what's more, it's all in round, yellow, golden sovereigns. Now, Cap., you can believe me or not, just as you like; but I know we've got men aboard here who'd cut every throat in the ship rather than let a sum like that get away from them. And yet you sit there and tell me to go slow and treat the beggars easy. Why, if I don't show 'em, right from the start, that I'm top dog, and mean to stay there, then you and I and the rest of us white men would be wise to step over the side now. We'd be a darned sight more comfortable there than if we stayed aboard.'

"Yes, that's just about the way that man talked to me. I was scared. And when I had more time to think about things I was more scared than ever. You say you can't sleep because of the smell of this sugar. Well, I tell you, with that cargo aboard, I *daren't* sleep! What worried me most was that I couldn't do anything about it. I knew, against that crowd of Chinamen, we nine whites were helpless. They could have knocked us on the head and thrown us all overboard any night they liked. That grill amidships the charterers were so proud about was really as much use

as nothing, because it didn't prevent any one from climbing over the engine-room casing and dropping down on us from the top of the fiddley. Then the Indian Ocean's a lonely place. Ships didn't carry wireless then, remember, and there was no port I could run into. Even if there had been I didn't see what excuse I could give for calling in anywhere. It's a serious thing for a master to deviate out of his proper voyage. It means expense to the owners, waste of time and bunkers, with the insurance on the ship invalidated, and the Lord knows what else. You've got to have some mighty good reasons before you dare deviate—and what reasons could I give? I should have looked pretty blowing in somewhere, and saying I'd come because I was scared of what my cargo might get up to. No, I could see I'd got to get the ship to Ching-Wan-Tau or nowhere. You see, I was in a nasty fix—and no way out of it.

"For the first week things kept more or less quiet. There was a lot of grousing about the chow, of course, and a scrap or so at nights in the 'tween-decks; but nothing much happened to amount to anything until two coolies died of beri-beri, and there was a riot because we dumped them over the side. It seems their friends wanted to keep 'em and bury them in China; but we couldn't keep any corpses aboard, of course, and Finch had to climb up on the after-hatch and tell 'em so. Things looked nasty for a bit, but when they burst out laughing at something he'd said, I knew Finch had managed to fix 'em. He told me afterwards what the joke was. 'I told 'em,' he says, 'we didn't feel like keeping any corpses about the place this hot weather, but the next man that died, his friends could have him—and welcome. And then I offered to bet ten dollars Mex. to a ticcy *they* wouldn't keep him for more than three days. They saw the sense of the thing then, and that settled

it.' Finch said he didn't mind that kind of trouble, and how it was simple enough to settle just ordinary foolishness like that with nothing ugly behind it.

"'What worries me,' he says, 'is this small knife outfit the beggars have started. How they smuggled the knives through beats me, especially when I think of the way I went through 'em as they came aboard. I could have sworn there wasn't a weapon of any sort on the lot, and now here's these damned small knives turned up. I don't know how many there are yet, or who's got them; but I reckon there's maybe a dozen or twenty coolies aboard each with a knife on him. And, Cap., these are the birds we've got to look out for. They'll get together; and, in fact, as far as I can make out, they've formed themselves into a sort of a gang already. It's in the nature of a Chinaman to do that sort of thing. A secret society's a regular institution with 'em, and a secret society's just what these swine with the knives have formed. It's secret all right, because I'll be hung if I can find out who's in it; but what they call themselves—to give you the English of it—is "Small Knife Society." I've managed to find that much out, anyway. I was anxious enough about this trip of ours right from the start; but now this thing's happened—well, I'm scared, and I'll admit it. It's all very well to say they've only got little pocket-knives, which is the only kind of a knife they could have hidden; but the point is, they *are* armed. "In the country of the blind the one-eyed man is boss," so twenty men with knives on 'em and working together are going to run the rest of this bunch. They'll run them like sheep. They'll run them and they'll rob them; and if anybody objects they'll cut him up in small bits. I know these birds, Cap. I've worked with Chinese most of my life, and I can see what's going to happen as plain as if I was sitting in a

movie, with the picture running in front of my eyes and the man in the corner explaining it all through a megaphone. You mark what I say! Before we get to Ching-Wan-Tau the men who've got the knives will be the men who've got hold of most of the money too. They know, as well as we do, the minute this ship arrives she's going to be filled with police. Chinese police. And who'll collect that money then? Why, the police; and you can't tell me those Small Knife blighters are going to wait for that. No, sir! As sure as my name's Bill Finch, they'll try to do us in and then pile this ship of yours up somewhere handy, and clear out with what they've got. That is, they will if I can't stop 'em. I don't know if I can; but I'm going to have a shot at it.'

"It was about then that I began to think a lot more of Finch than I did when I first saw him. I think, if he hadn't been rash, he might perhaps have managed to settle the trouble. But he was rash. His notion was to jump right into the middle of a mess and try and clean it up that way, instead of skirmishing about a bit, like a wise man, and then putting his smack in where it was likely to do the most good. One morning he didn't show up at breakfast. He didn't turn up at all, although I turned the ship inside out looking for him. He just vanished."

"Good Lord!" said I. "What do you mean? What happened?"

"I don't know," went on the Skipper. "But I can guess. He must have made too much of a nuisance of himself for those Small Knife people, and I suppose they just laid for him one night when he was going his rounds, and then slipped him over the side. I should think that was about what happened. However, there he was—gone; and it seemed to me at first that it put the lid on things prop-

erly. The job was up to me then—and I couldn't see how I was going to tackle it. The worst of it was, Finch was the only man in the ship who could talk Chinese, and I couldn't find one coolie out of the lot who understood English. So there we were, you see, with the ship a regular powder magazine, a sleeping volcano and a tower of Babel all rolled into one, and me tongue-tied and pretty well helpless.

"And I tell you, with Finch gone and out of the way, things didn't take long to warm up. The daytime wasn't so bad: just that crowd of yellow beggars squatting all over the after-deck and chattering a language that didn't sound human. I'd go and take a look at them through the bars of that grill, and I'd say to myself, 'There they are, my son. Just ordinary John Chinamen, taking it easy and doing nothing. No need to be scared of *them*.' And then I'd catch the glint of an eye maybe, or a sideways look from a face chock-full of evil; and I'd feel like you do when you go to the Zoo and look at the lions and tigers—specially the tigers. It was the nights, though, that got on your nerves. There was hell to pay at night down those afterholds. You could hear it. I didn't know *what* was going on, you understand, because we never dared go aft in the dark at all. But you could hear things happening all night. Plenty of things, and it was awful. Those Small Knife devils were doing it all, just as Finch warned me they would. I had plain proof of it. Da Silva, our Doc., was a better man than I'd thought. He wouldn't face that hospital of his on top of the wheel-house at night; but each morning he'd go aft and attend to what would be waiting for him. And every day there'd be maybe six or a dozen poor devils, all cut about and bleeding, for him to sew up and bandage. I used to go aft too, and lend him a hand,

and I noticed the wounds were all about the same—just slashes and long shallow cuts as if they'd been done with razors or small sharp knives. I don't remember that we ever had a real deep wound to deal with; but all the same we had some horrible-looking cases. And five of 'em died —from loss of blood, I guess, as there wasn't much whole skin left on any of 'em. That Small Knife lot was putting its trade-marks on the rest of the bunch all right.

"It was plain enough what they were up to: just robbing the rest, as Finch said they would, and if any one kicked or tried to make a fight of it, then they sliced him up, and Da Silva and me we'd have to fix up the results in the morning. At the rate they were working I could see it wouldn't be long before they'd have every coolie in the ship cleaned out, and then, as likely as not, it would be *our* turn. If I could only have talked the lingo I might have done something. Roused up the rest of the Chinks, perhaps, and made 'em set about those Small Knife birds. Or at least I might have found out who they were, and then we whites could have had a go at them. As it was, I was helpless; but I did what I could, of course. I got the engineers to connect up some flexible hose to the deck steam-pipes. We led the hoses up on the bridge, so that if steam was turned on they'd squirt straight down both bridge ladders. We reckoned to gather on the bridge if things got desperate, and give the beasts a dose of high-pressure live steam, and boil a few of them at any rate before they scuppered us.

"With all this worry and trouble on my mind I was a fine sample of a nervous wreck by the time we'd run across the Indian Ocean and raised Achin Head. One night, when we were about half-way down the Malacca Straits, I was standing up here trying to make up my mind

whether or not to take the ship into Singapore—and chance getting fired for it,—when I caught sight of somebody leaning on the rail right up in the bows. It was dark, but I could make out the shape of the man against the sky, and I saw he was a Chinaman. It startled me, because the fore-part of the ship wasn't a place where any coolie ought to have been. I could see the man wasn't one of the crew, for, even at night, it's easy to tell the difference between a Chinaman and a Lascar. It wasn't natural, anyhow, for any of the hands to be knocking about forward at that time of night; and you know our look-out man is stationed up in the crow's-nest and never on the fo'c'sle head. Well, things being in the state they were, I thought I'd better go forward and see what the fellow was up to. I had on my carpet slippers, so I sneaked quietly along the deck; and when I tell you I felt in my pocket to see if I had my gun on me, you'll understand the state of mind I'd got into during that last week or two.

"The chap was standing right up in the eyes of the ship, and I'd got about abreast of the windlass before he heard me. I startled him all right, and he jumped round and stared at me with his mouth open. And then it was my turn to jump. I recognized him at once. He was the bird who should have been ironed to a stanchion down Number One hold—the murderer, in fact, that Finch had made such a fuss about when he'd first come aboard. I'd clean forgotten all about him, and it gave my poor nerves an awful shock to run suddenly up against the beggar like that. I suppose I must have got rattled, because, though I don't remember pulling out my gun, I can still see myself jumping about behind the windlass like some fool in the movies and pointing my revolver in the general direction of that poor man. No wonder I scared him. He dodged about, too.

Then, 'Don't shoot!' he sings out. 'It's all right. Don't shoot.' And I was so surprised at hearing English from him that I couldn't have stopped him if he'd come for me. However, he didn't show any signs of that, and when he'd got over his scare and I'd got over mine, we just stood there looking at each other and feeling sheepish—at least, I know I did. I think it struck both of us that a grown man can make a terrible ass of himself if he isn't careful.

"'Well, John,' says I at last, 'it may be very funny and all that; but you're supposed to be a dangerous murderer, and what I want to know is how did you get on deck? And what d'you mean by talking English anyway?' He didn't speak for a bit; just hung his head and backed away to the rail and looked sulky, and I was pulling out my whistle to call the watch when he suddenly put out his hand to me and said, 'Don't.' Like that he said it; just 'Don't,' and there was something about the way he spoke that I—well, I didn't. I asked him again who he was and how he'd come by his English, and after a bit he went right ahead and told me his trouble. I can't remember his words, of course, but if you'll believe me, he talked better English than I do myself. It turns out he'd lived in London for seven years or so, learning to be a doctor, which accounted for things. He asked me if I was an officer, and when I told him who I was he opened out a lot. He said an Englishman would give him a square deal if any one would, and then he asked me to give him a chance. A few days after we'd started, it seems he'd discovered he could slip his wrist out of his handcuff. He was left quite alone down the hold, and the only time he saw anybody was when one of the cooks brought his chow down to him in the morning. He'd lie low all day, he said; but on some nights, when things were quiet on deck, he'd venture up

for a bit and get some clean air. He said he'd made up his mind to wait and drop over the side one night and swim for it if we passed close enough to any land. It was a mighty slim chance; but the man was desperate, and I could see he meant to do what he said. I was the only soul aboard who knew he could slip his irons, and he begged me to say nothing and leave him to take his chance. In any case, he said he'd rather drown than be tortured to death, which was what he seemed to think he was due for if the Chinese officials got hold of him again.

"He didn't tell me exactly what it was he'd been up to in China to make himself so unpopular with the authorities; but as far as I could make out he'd been what we'd call an agitator or something like that, and that's a thing you know very well yourself the Chinese high muck-a-mucks won't stand for at any price. He must have had some sort of following, too, in Tientsin, which was where he'd been at work, because they started to riot one day and did in a mandarin or somebody, and then this chap had been arrested and tortured to make him give away his pals. He said he wouldn't do it, and he'd been waiting and hoping for a quick death, when they surprised him by putting him aboard ship and sending him off to South Africa. I think the man must just have been a natural born kicker. I mean, if he saw any dirty work going on he was the sort that couldn't rest unless he'd done his darnedest to clean things up. He even gets into trouble again on his mine. He found a gang there who were running and robbing the rest of the coolies and doing 'em in with a steel drill or a charge of dynamite if they objected. He said he couldn't stand it, so he got up a gang of his own. It was pretty much the same sort of thing he'd done before in Tientsin, and there'd been scrapping, of course, and some

more men killed. He told me his lot had managed more or less to clean the other gang up; and then, with his usual luck, he ran foul of the Jo'burg C.I.D. They found out he had something to do with the business, but they got hold of the wrong end of the stick, because, instead of giving him credit for stopping the trouble they reckoned he was the cause of it, and ran him in for murder.

"That was his yarn, or as much as I can remember of it. It was a hard luck tale anyhow, and I was sorry for him, and believed him. And his talk had set me thinking. I hadn't exactly a plan in my head; but what he'd said about that gang down the mine reminded me of my own troubles. 'If he managed to fix that lot,' thinks I to myself, 'then he might be able to settle these Small Knife beggars too.' That was a good thought, and when I'd got it clear in my head I put it to him flat. I told him the state of things aboard us, and what I was afraid might happen before the ship got in. I told him everything, and then I said straight out that, if he thought he could settle the business, I'd see he got his chance to get away.

" 'If you think you can do it,' I said, 'then go ahead. But you must understand I can't help you—openly at any rate. You were put aboard here as a murderer. You're in my charge, and my job is to hand you over to the police as soon as we arrive. But if you pull this thing off for me, then I'll give you every chance I can to get clear away from the ship before the police get hold of you. You'll have to trust me,' I said. 'Will you do it?' And 'I will,' says he, straight out like a man, and I knew from the way he spoke that I could trust him too. He held out his hand to me on the strength of our bargain, like a Christian, and we shook.

"And then, for the best part of an hour I should think,

we two stood there behind the windlass and planned things out. I was hoping to goodness all the while that no one would see us, because if one single soul aboard the ship ever got to know I was hand and glove with the man like that, his escape would look too fishy and more than I'd care to risk. He saw that point, too; so we tried to settle things then and there, so as not to have to see each other again, that being too risky. We agreed he'd better stay down below in his irons during the daytime, and do what he had to do at night. He wouldn't tell me how he was going to set about the job; but he seemed fairly certain that if he could get into the afterpart of the ship he'd be able to manage. I told him how he could do that by climbing over the fiddley and engine-room casing. 'If I can find friends aboard,' he said, 'it will be less difficult. But, Captain, I must have a weapon. There is only one way to stop those men now,' he says. 'Captain—you must let me have your pistol.'

"Now this was something I tell you I didn't like the thought of at all. Don't misunderstand me. I trusted that man, and I wasn't scared he'd turn my own gun on me. No. But I didn't like to think what else he might have to do with it. He was as good as a self-confessed murderer, remember—in a good cause, maybe; but, still—a murderer. And, believe me, it makes you think before you hand over a loaded automatic to a man like that. And I was thinking hard, and wondering what I'd better do, when he bent down and looked me close and straight between the eyes. 'It's either them or us, Captain,' he said, 'and you must face it.' And with that he took the thing gently out of my hand —and I let him take it. He balanced it in his hand for a little, and then he said, 'Good. When the matter is finished,

you shall have proof of it. Then you must tell me how to escape.'

"'If the ship ever gets to Ching-Wan-Tau,' I said, 'that's all the proof I'll need; and the best chance I can see for you is to swim for it, as you meant to before. What else can we do? You'll have to swim; but I'll see the ship gets in to Ching-Wan-Tau Roads at night and I'll anchor her as close as I dare to the land. I'll try and see the way's all clear for you—and the rest you'll have to do yourself. You'll be in your irons down the hold, and, as soon as we anchor, you must slip up on deck quickly and drop over the side and swim ashore. Will you be all right if you do get ashore?'"

"'If I can land without being seen,' he says, 'I've friends who'll hide me. But how shall I know when the time has come—to swim?'"

"'When the anchor's let go,' I said. 'Then's your time. You'll hear the chain running out all right. You'll hear that down the hold even if you're asleep. Well—that will be the signal.'

"'Good,' says he again. 'But take the ship in very close to the shore, Captain. I can't swim far; but I'll trust you. You must trust me too, and when I've done what I've got to do, remember, I'll be waiting and listening for your signal.'

"After that we shook hands again on our bargain, and I left him. I went up on the bridge and he went down the hold. I didn't see him again."

The Skipper's long chair screeched as he sat up suddenly. For a while he said nothing at all; but when he spoke again his voice surprised me. "It's not wise," he said, "to put too much trust in any man. We trusted each other too

much, and it isn't fair. We're only human—and things happen: things you can't foresee. And one forgets. Just for a second or two, perhaps; but one *does* forget—and then the trust is broken. No, it wasn't fair."

"Ah! I see," said I. "So your trusted murderer didn't fulfill his bargain? Well, I must say, I'm not surprised."

"Him?" went on the Skipper. "Don't you make any mistake, my friend. He didn't fail. No. He did all he said he would; although I don't know how he did it. I can only guess, and go by the facts—as they appeared. For instance, you take the facts we'd find each day inside Da Silva's hospital. The first few days after I'd made my bargain there'd be the usual crop of victims—twelve to twenty poor devils, that is, all slashed up and bleeding. And then one morning Da Silva comes along, smiling all over his face. 'They don't fight no more,' says he. 'Today there is no one cut.' But next morning he wasn't so happy. 'Bad, Captain, bad,' he says. 'Four men they bring me today. Four—all shot in the face and dead. It's bad for us, Captain, I think, now they begin shooting.'

" 'Maybe it's not so bad as you think, Doc.,' I told him. And that's all I'd say, for I guessed what had happened. And when I went aft and took a look at the corpses, I knew it was all right—for my partner wasn't one of 'em.

"The next fact to appear was an old gunny bag. It was shoved through the port-hole over my bunk that same night, and it fell on me with a bump and a rattle that scared me out of the first good sleep I'd had since we'd left Durban. I switched on my light in a hurry and picked the thing up. It was heavy, and the mouth of it was tied up with a piece of twine. For a little while I just sat there looking at the thing, and wondering who'd thrown it in and what was in it. But when I did open it and spilt the

contents out on my blanket, I understood at once. It was a message—to tell me one side of the bargain had been fulfilled. It was proof, too, that tumbled out of that bag on to my lap. Nineteen small knives and my Colt automatic was proof enough for me. The knives were just ordinary folding pocket-knives, and the blades of four of them were broken; but all the rest were as sharp as razors. The barrel of the gun was fouled, and the magazine was short of four cartridges. It was good evidence; but I wasn't keen on any one else seeing it, so I put the things into the bag again, and went out on deck and dropped the lot overboard. For a minute or two I thought of going forward and paying my friend a visit. I wanted to tell him I understood, and thank him, and try to make some better arrangement for getting him clear of the ship; but there was a bright moon shining full on the forward deck, and the officer on the bridge would have been certain to see me, so I turned in again—and slept.

"Next day at noon Cape Shangtung was abeam, and we headed west to run through the Gulf of Pechili to Ching-Wan-Tau. That gave us two hundred seventy miles to go, and meant arriving about three o'clock the next afternoon. This wouldn't do, and I saw I'd have to slow the ship up if I was to carry out my part of the bargain and get her in after dark. Now, you can't go easing a ship down unless you've got good reasons for it. It all goes down in the log, of course, and when you get home they call you up to the office and want to know what you've been playing at. However, there it was, and I'd got to chance it. Slowed down the ship had got to be, office or no office, and I was trying hard to think of a good excuse, when the weather supplied me with the finest kind of a one I could have wished for. It came on thick. It started with some patches of fog closing

down on us about four in the afternoon, and it got thicker and thicker, until by ten o'clock that night we were steaming dead slow, and you couldn't see the foremast from the bridge. The Gulf of Pechili's a horrible place to be drifting around in in thick weather. When a fog shuts in properly there it's apt to last for a long while, and the blessed tides run all over the place at the rate of knots, and you can't tell where or how far they're going to set you. By midnight I didn't like the look of things. We'd been dodging along dead slow for hours, and I wasn't sure within twenty miles or so where we'd got to. Cape Lai Lee Shan was somewhere ahead of us I hoped; but I didn't want to hit it, so I stopped the engines and sent the Second Mate aft to take a cast of the lead. I did it because it never pays to take chances at sea, especially in a fog; but as a matter of fact I felt pretty sure we'd got plenty of water under us. So you can understand when that young officer of mine came running up the bridge ladder singing out he'd got bottom at eight fathoms, it gave me the deuce of a start. We'd been set to the devil and gone off our course, and there was only one thing to be done. I roused out the Mate to stand by forward, and then took another cast of the lead. This time we only got six fathoms, and I saw it was high time to bring the ship up and wait until we could see something. 'Stand by, forward,' I sang out, and 'All ready, sir,' answers the Mate. 'Let go, then,' I shouted, and 'Leggo, sir,' says he. Then there was a squeak from the windlass brake and our cable roared out through the hawse pipe, shaking the whole ship as it went. 'Give her thirty-five fathoms to the water's edge, mister,' I said, and then I walked to the binnacle to watch which way the tide would swing us. And the tide there must have been running like a race, for as soon as the ship brought up on her cable she

swung round through nine points so quickly you'd have thought a tug had got hold of her head. I looked over the side and heard the tide regularly sluicing past us. 'Hear that?' said I to the Second. 'No wonder we've been set off to blazes.' And then, in a flash, I understood what I'd done. I feared I was too late; but it wasn't many seconds before I found myself on the fore deck, shouting down the hold to the man who'd been waiting there and listening for the signal I'd promised to give. I called and I kept on calling; but I got no answer. He'd heard the signal. He'd taken me at my word and gone overboard—with the ship somewhere in the middle of the Pechili Straits and a five-knot tide running past her straight out to sea."

The awning bellied out above us and came down again with a smack on the spreaders, and a warm brisk wind that I had not noticed before made my pyjamas flap about my legs. There are times when it is not well to talk, so I held my tongue and waited. In a little while the Skipper spoke again. "You go and turn in," he said. "There's a nice breeze now, and your berth's to wind'ard, so you ought to be able to sleep. And if you can't, you can spend your time nicely thanking God there's only the smell from some sweating sugar to keep *you* awake."

## VI

## "A LITTLE SAIL"

"I have passed manye landes and manye yles and contrees, and cherched many full straunge places . . . Now I am comen home to rest."—Sir John Maundeville.

Some weeks ago I was invited to spend a few days on a farm in Essex, and, being a sailor, I naturally jumped at the chance to discover finally what real degree of truth might lie behind that veiled implication—"Who'd sell a farm and go to sea?"—which I had listened to many a time growled out by old shell-backs momentarily disgusted with the treatment meted out to them by the element on whose implacable bosom they had chosen to work and to live. My imagination had, of course, created many pictures for me of farms and of the life on farms, but that Essex farm-house, when I found it, proved to be distinctly unlike anything that I had ever dreamed.

Wicklea Wick, or Wickilywick, as the natives say, was as quaint as its quaint name. It stood, like an island, in the midst of a lone expanse of wistful marshland, painted by the placid evening light in soft and sleepy tints, and full of the plaintive cries of birds. Around the house I found a moat—a veritable moat—with duck swimming in it; wild ones, too, for they all flew away as I walked up, over what must once have been the drawbridge, under a rounded Saxon arch and into a stone-paved hall. That hall

had in it an open fireplace, ten feet square if it was an inch, and on one wall, stuck there like some giant swallow's nest, was a minstrels' gallery!

Now, it occurs to me that all these things may seem quite natural, but to a man whose feet have merely touched his country's pavements, and who has rarely trodden on his native soil, the moat and the minstrels' gallery appeared to be quite out of place—and out of time too; six or seven hundred years out at that. Earlier in the day I had stayed my journey in the ancient British hamlet of St. Osyth, and there drunken a tankard of something which I was assured was "real old oyster-feast," so now I began to wonder if the strength of that strange liquor . . .

But my host appearing then, I knew, improbable though it seemed, that I was neither drunk nor dreaming, but merely a pilgrim lost in an England where—I made up my mind to it then and there—I was likely to happen on anything. It was as well for me that I decided to adopt this attitude of mind so early in the proceedings, for presently I found my fellow-guests to be the illustrious members of a far-famed company, resting after their play's successful run, together with a gentleman from the lap of the old Imperial Court in Peking; proud, yellow, and aristocratic, Mr. Van Ping by name. Of course, if one be fortunate, one may meet such individuals as these without the fact appearing strange at all. But—on an Essex farm! Anyhow, there I found them; and that night a crew of pirates, plus a captive Chinaman, sat down to a most tumultuous feast, and barbecued their meat before the great hall fire. Mr. Van Ping would *not* make up, but I had a splendid crimson sash and a real cutlass, dredged at some distant time from out the moat, where I think some smuggler in a hurry must have cast it. And here I wish to say that rump-

steaks hung on a string and spun gently before a blaze are perfectly delightful; but all the same it astonished me to find this method of cookery still in vogue in England.

The feast completed, our captive women sang and danced before us, and the Lady with the Wonderful Voice intoned, from the dimness of the gallery, words that Masefield has set down concerning ships and the sea, and the men who sail upon it, until I found a lump in my throat that badly needed swallowing. It was a night for a sailor unused to pleasant nights to store up in his memory; and so, at last, with the thought of these things stirring in my mind, I limped, tired but very happy, to bed. I limped, because the Lady who Dances had bandaged my piratical leg and painted on it, with a stick of lip-salve, a terrible wound; so, of course, I *had* to limp.

Next morning the light awoke me, and looking forth from my window across the marshes, I saw a red-brown sail glide, stately, through the fields. A sail and spar, sustained upon no hull that I could see, sliding across meadows remote from any sea, was a mystery that intrigued me; but I was not surprised, for I remembered in time that this was England, where anything may happen; so I went downstairs (solid oak, without a creak in them) to breakfast.

Then the Lady who Dances, the gentleman from Peking, and I set out to solve the riddle of that wandering casual sail. We walked on spongy earth that squirted mud at every footstep, through lush grasses, and amongst plovers who mobbed us. I do not know why, but perhaps, being English birds, they disliked our Chinaman. I relate facts merely, and I do not attempt to account for the extraordinary things that happened to me that day. In any case, if you are English, presumably you will understand, with-

out the help of any theories advanced by a bewildered stranger in your fantastic land.

We fled to escape the infuriated lapwings, until suddenly brought up by something that opened at our feet and yawned at us. It was a thing that, in any reasonable country, I should have called a spruit, nullah, or donga; but this affair, though blood brother to all three, had sloping banks composed of the muddiest mud I have ever seen anywhere. The color of the thing was a greasy zinc, and I thought of West Coast fever creeks, and sniffed and looked around for crocodiles—and listened. But there seemed to be no mosquitoes, so we proceeded, cautiously, downstream—the very twistiest stream in all the world, I think.

I became acclimatized rapidly, I suppose, for I was not much surprised when we came upon the yacht. Rounding the thousandth bend of that incredible ditch, dike, or drain, a thing I had supposed to be a post upon the bank transformed itself into the mast-head of a small black cutter, lying afloat in a scanty trickle of dirty water at the bottom of that absurd fissure of mud. It was as though one had surprised a rakish brig roosting at the bottom of a hole in the sands of the Sahara. But I kept myself in hand, and after a little while, I hailed her, when a face arose through her cabin hatch and smiled at us. It was a smile of welcome and goodwill, without a trace of wonder or derision in it. Which was really surprising. For we three pilgrims, materializing suddenly from nowhere, must have looked, to say the least, odd. The Lady who Dances wore a blood-red 'kerchief bound about her lovely head, a sweater green as young willow shoots in spring, and a pair of beautiful indigo-blue riding-breeches. The Gent from Peking conveys, at first sight, the impression that he is a kind of toy lion. He has a really splendid mane, and

a tail for all the world like a yellow chrysanthemum, and he holds this up in the air when pleased, which he was then. His eyes stick out a great deal, and his tummy, owing to the excessive shortness of his legs, was matted with mud. As for me, in whatever raiment I may clothe myself, I invariably seem to incite strong feelings of scorn and derision in all beholders.

Such were we, but our new friend, instead of calling upon his gods to come down and witness his amazement, merely remarked, "Good-morning. Won't you come aboard?" I looked at the Lady, and I could see, from the lights dancing in her eyes, that her soul thirsted to embark immediately upon this adventure. Then I contemplated the twenty feet or so of sloping bottomless mud that lay between her and her heart's desire, and I tried to think of any way to cross it. I gave it up. And then, not for the only time that day, our friend showed us that he was the sort of fellow who cannot be defeated. "Oh, that's all right," cried he. "I'll heave you the end of the dinghy painter, and you can easily haul her up to you. Then you all get in, you know, and shove with an oar a bit, and she'll toboggan down there like winkin'."

We did these things, and it was even as he said, except that the bit of a shove with an oar was quite unneeded. Indeed, I found it necessary to restrain the boat by force from dashing away with her two passengers before I could fling myself aboard. But I managed it—a flying pier-head jump,—and then the toboggan started. Have you ever seen an expert flying down the Cresta Run on his stomach with his legs waving in the breeze? Well, that was me; and I even tried to steer with my feet as that dinghy charged madly down the slimy bank, straight as an arrow for her parent's side. I drove my starboard leg down to the knee

in the mud; but it was all useless, for the boat refused to answer her helm, and finished the run by butting the yacht hard, right between wind and water, and fair amidships. There was a "crack" which told unmistakably of something started somewhere, and the Lady who Dances cried out aloud, surprisingly; while I mentioned the nether regions by another name; and the Pekingese gentleman also threw his tongue. But our imperturbable friend remarked, "Well done! You did it beautifully. The dinghy's bent a bit, but she'll do. If I were you I'd hang my leg in the creek and wash it; and then, if you like, we'll go for a little sail."

I was not at all clear how George (for this he assured us was his name) proposed to sail in that contorted drain, but soon I began to understand that there was a lot more in George than met the eye. "We'll have to drop down stern first," said he, "until there's room to turn; so, if you'll heave up the anchor, I'll shove her along with the pole." A sailor obeys an order without asking questions, so I hove up on the chain; and although there was only a fathom of it to come, the mud it brought up with it was impressive, and it covered the foredeck completely with a species of slimy globigeringous ooze. "Don't worry about that," said George. "She'll wash it off herself when we get out. Will you push with the spinnaker boom, please? If we don't hurry we're likely to stick on the bar. Then, there we'll be, you know."

Twenty-five years at sea is not the best training for punting with spinnaker booms through Essex mud. In theory the thing is simple. You plant your pole on the bottom and push the boat along. In practice, you push and the pole sinks deeply into the mud, and your struggles to get it out again pull the boat the wrong way. When striving

desperately to push a boat ahead it is exasperating—nay, maddening—to find that the harder you work the more you are urging her in precisely the wrong direction. And when a confounded son of a celestial and yellow lady-dog persists in getting between your legs with the idea that he is assisting you to repel mythical boarders . . . Well, you kick him, hard; and he is most surprised. But this relieves your outraged feelings, and it makes the Lady who Dances laugh—which is always worth while. Then I did what I should have done before. I watched George, and I found him achieving, with easy grace, feats of the most incredible dexterity. His method was to reach out well ahead, drive his pole into the mud, and then pull the boat up to it. It seemed simple enough, and I decided at once to conform to his style. So I, too, reached well ahead with my boom, harpooned the bottom with it, and then pulled hard. And the boom withdrew itself from its hole suddenly, with disgusting sounds as of stomach-pumps functioning furiously. I sat down. I sat down hard. I sat down extremely quickly on Mr. Van Ping. Which was entirely his own fault, for he should not have determined so continuously to infest me. I retired then. I refused to play any more, and George said it was just as well.

There was something about that man I liked. I do still—in spite of all he did to us. He was working hard now with his pole, and I gathered that the question of crossing the approaching bar was troubling him. For the bar was approaching, and speedily; for the strongly running ebb now hurried us steadfastly along between the banks of slime, until these presently spread out on either side and fell away from us, revealing, amazingly—the sea! At least George said it was the sea; and the North Sea, too; but we still have our doubts about it. The color of the water was

very queer for one thing—thick and jaundiced,—and there was not enough of it there really for a proper sea. We drifted out from the shore a mile or more before I ventured to congratulate George on his successful passage of the bar. But, "We've not got over it yet," said he, thrusting his faithful pole overboard. And, lo, it touched bottom at five feet. And this was the sea—the North Sea!

Then, in the midst of that vacant windless stretch of eerie water, our boat, without a stitch of sail upon her, began to list. Gently at first, then direfully, over she heeled, and the still waters slid abruptly into rapid motion and sped, foaming, past our sides. Over we went till the deck was half awash, while against our exposed bilge arose a seething frothing yellow wave. George, letting go his anchor, appeared to take these miracles with perfect calm; but to the rest of us it seemed as though some giant hand had seized upon our keel and was dragging us, fiercely, broadside on against the tide. This exciting and impressive performance left us expectant and amazed; but George said we were merely stuck on the bar, and if we didn't roll over we'd do, which struck me as being a most inadequate way of summing up an apparently miraculous and obviously perilous situation.

I think there must have been a hole in that bar, into which we mercifully slid, for suddenly our giant let go his hold, and the boat stood once more upright, riding to her anchor, head on to the rushing tide. George, a lucid soul, remarked, "Well, here we are," an accurate observation; for there we certainly were, and there we remained for six portentous and unforgettable hours, chock-full—all of them—with interest and excitement.

We watched the waters dwindle and recede, to depart at last beyond our horizon, leaving us desolate and en-

compassed by a very ocean of mud. We leant our elbows on the rail and gazed at those sleek leagues of circumambient mire, until a tinge of sadness begat by the cheerless scene began to steal upon us. And then, upon our nostrils, too, there stole faint whiffs and savors as of fish, long dead; and from the well arose a sound of snorts and growls and scrapings.

The fight broke out with a crash of upset pails, and we hastened aft in time to see the memorable battle of the Pekingese Dog and the Bucket of Slipper-Limpets. The struggle raged, appropriately enough, on the cockpit floor, and there we found the Gent from China holding his own fairly easily, the short, sharp, fiery dash with which the limpets had opened their campaign having apparently completely exhausted them. Also, it is only fair to add that though they held a decided advantage in numbers, the limpets were sadly handicapped by lack of condition. They were clearly not in training. In fact, it soon became clear to me that the members of that devoted band not already dying or dead were all very far gone indeed with some sort of badly wasting sickness. The Slipper-Limpets had evidently been lying quietly in their bucket, at peace with the world, when the Chinaman unprovokedly attacked them. The heroic band, with a magnificent effort, the bravery of which compels our admiration, had arisen as one limpet and hurled themselves upon the head of their enemy, only to fall at last fainting on the battlefield. But mark the heights to which a slipper-limpet rises. Swooning, dying, and dead they lay, trampled on, bitten and chewed by their ferocious and barbaric enemy. But in this desperate and hopeless situation do they hoist the white flag, hold up their hands, and cry "Kamerad"? No, a thousand times no! For the true slipper-limpet remains unconquerable—

even in death. Down their serried ranks they passed the awful word, "Launch the gas attack!" And they did. . . .

We left that place in a hurry and the dinghy, pushing her through the mud to wind'ard with the oars. Mr. Van Ping we also left upon the stricken field. He howled despairingly, but we did not want him. He had been far too intimately associated with his late adversaries to allow us to love him any more.

"George," said the Lady who Dances, "*why* do you carry those horrible things about with you? Are they pets, and are you attached to them? Don't say you eat them!"

"No," said George, "they're bait. They eat oysters, you know, but the dabs like 'em. I'd forgotten about that lot, and they must have been in the bucket a fortnight. Harmless little chaps if you don't rouse them. But, by Jingo, *when* you do! We will now wait here a bit till the whiff's eased off, then I'll go back and clean up, and we'll have some lunch."

When the time was ripe we proceeded hopefully to urge the reluctant dinghy back across the mud. But it was not to be, for she bedded herself down comfortably in her wallow, and, nestling there cosily, she now refused to budge. George then rashly jumped out to push, and sank to past his middle in the ooze; and when I followed him to help, all of me below my third waistcoat button was immediately swallowed up.

Mr. Van Ping, marooned upon the yacht with only the spirits of departed slipper-limpets to keep him company, gave tongue lugubriously. I looked at George, and I think my face was white, and I know I was sweating coldly, for the fear of a very dreadful death had arisen in my heart. George for once had discovered an adversary in whose face he could not smile, and I have reason to believe that icy

sweats were afflicting him also. But, "Well, here we are," said he, clinging, it seemed to me, with misplaced affection to an overworked phrase; but it showed his heart was in the right place, and this did me good, for by now my last waistcoat button was disappearing.

Then the Lady who Dances began to take an active part in the affair. Without a word she handed out the oars, and whilst with these we tried to impede our lingering burial, she took the dinghy's bottom boards, and planting these unsteady stepping-stones before her as she went, she passed, dainty and sure, across the shuddering surface of the quicksand. The rapturous nature of Mr. Van Ping's welcome was as nothing to the glad fervor with which we greeted the end of the main sheet that presently smacked the mud into our faces. Grabbing it we pulled hard, only to find we were by then so well and truly planted that it was impossible to exhume ourselves.

But George, as ever, rose even to this occasion. "Take your end forward to the windlass and heave on it," cried he. "And you, pass me your oar and make the line fast under your arms. And if I were you I'd throw a bowline or you're likely to regret it." These things being accomplished, the Lady hove away, the rope tautened, and I, strangled and kicking, drew out at last from that reluctant mud. By the time I reached the yacht there was not very much of George above the surface, and what there was of him was sinking visibly by the stern. But we salvaged him in time, and being thin, he uncorked easily enough. We drew him alongside, and his words when he touched the deck once more were, under the circumstances, impressive. "Wash and brush-up. Then grub, I think," said he.

The wash and brush-up was not a success at all, but the grub when it came was entirely amazing. Crouching in

that tiny cabin, we watched with awe while George performed miracles upon two Primus stoves. From somewhere, apparently the bilge, he drew forth steaks, which presently, sizzling in olive oil, he anointed with strange and pungent condiments. Onions he produced from dark and mysterious holes, and potatoes also, to be fried cunningly beneath the meat. Coffee boiled in a black and battered pan sounds most unpromising, but, with George presiding at the brew, a fresh and fragrant beverage somehow results. Then I learned, in succession, how toast can be made —to perfection, too—upon a blow-lamp; how beer, in a frying-pan, may be sweetly mulled; and of the divine virtue that may be extracted by an expert from a mere tin of pork and beans. I found out, too, how all these operations, and others besides, may be so synchronized as to achieve in due time that most desirable affair—the perfect meal.

"Dee-licious," said the Lady who Dances, gazing at her empty plates. "I didn't think it could be done. George, you are a wonder, and I feel myself beginning to love you." And I, replete, leant back upon the cushions and agreed with her.

"Being no sea-water within miles," said George, "we can't wash-up; so we'll sit and smoke and wait till she floats."

For the next two hours we sat, in the diminutive but adequately appointed hole which George calls his cabin, well-fed, warm, and cosy, while George held forth enlighteningly upon the peculiar difficulties and quaint hazards which beset all navigators adventuring on the besmirched and tide-tormented waters of the Thames estuary. By tea-time a rising wind was whistling through our rigging, with those low mournful pipings which I have

found to be a sure prelude to a spell of dirty weather out of the south-west. Across a sky, gloomy and overcast, the scud was even then commencing to hurry, and a line of heaving whiteness across the mud-flats marked the returning of the waters.

"Do you get much sea on these banks of yours with a hard sou'-westerly wind, George?"

"Oh, heavy enough to break us up—if the bottom's hard," said George. "But, as you know, it isn't. No. That's not troubling me, and I don't care where I go, of course; but this is a dead head wind for you people, and in a jobble the old boat will *not* go to wind'ard."

"That's nice," said I. "Then what's the evolution?"

"Hang on to our anchor, I think, till there's water enough to float us right over the bar, and then run for Harwich."

"Harwich!" exclaimed the Lady.

"I'm afraid so," said George. "It's not far, though. Down the coast, and take the first turning on the left. I haven't a chart, but I can make it all right. But I'm afraid you'll be out all night."

"Can't be done, George," said I. "We've got to get this child home to her little cot tonight. You're a man of resource. How do we do it?"

"Oh, in that case, then Clacton's the only place. I'll take a chance and try and land you on the pier there, and you might get hold of a car to take you home."

"Right, George!" said I. "Clacton let it be."

Our destination thus decided on, there remained only the question whether the Fates would allow us to reach it; and upon this point I had my own grave doubts. It's true the wind was fair, but there seemed to me to be far too much of it, and it was raising a sea by now that prom-

ised to jolt us to pieces before we floated clear of the ground. The bottom was soft enough, no doubt, and a sound strong boat would not suffer much from pounding on it. But our boat was neither strong nor sound, and the marks of a very great age were visible upon her.

We waited.

The angry line of breaking waves moved steadily on across the dismal flats, seeming to close on us in menace. Those hurrying waters, reaching us at last, washed high about our sides, and soon each wave that passed us by began to lift us, and let us fall again upon a bottom manifestly changed to stone. The seas grew higher as the water rose, and I waited for our bruised hull to split and fall to pieces under the brutal pounding.

"If she doesn't hit a hard patch or slam the heel of her mast through the bottom, she'll do," said George contentedly. And the boat continuing indomitably to endure her punishment, I ventured to suppose she had been specially constructed for this work. But George assured me cheerfully that such was far from being the case. "Oh, no," said he. "Before I bought her and decked her in she was a Clacton beach boat. You know. Carting a gang of trippers round at a bob a head. Regular old shilling-vomiter she was, in fact."

"Ah, I see," said I. "And she seems to be taking again to her former habits. If I am not mistaken Mr. Van Ping already owes you three shillings; and I feel that if this bumping goes on much longer I shall be in your debt too."

"Do it well over the side, then, and we won't insist on our bob," said George, looking at the Lady who Dances, who was palpably scared, but just as palpably determined not to show it. "I believe," said he then, "if we put sail on her now she might drive over the bar. We'll try it any-

how, as things will be quieter if we get her under way."

With that he set about getting his cockleshell ready for sea in true deep-water style, and as master, mate, and crew in turn, he gave and carried out his orders. "Man the windlass," he roared. "And send a hand aft to the wheel. Anchor's away, sir. Then stand by your fore-topmast-staysail halyards. Leave the anchor hanging at the cat-heads and hoist away on that sail. Put up your helm and—damn it, the peak halyards have got away from me." These cheery sounds, floating to us aft out of the darkness, made our Lady laugh again, which all the time had been precisely George's laudable intention. Observing this, and knowing, too, how action tends to banish apprehension, I gave the Lady the tiller together with instructions, and then I crawled forward, to find George wrapped in a Laocoön-like coil of halyards.

I suppose I have set some hundreds of mainsails in my time, and George must have hoisted that one particular sail hundreds of times too. Yet this time George's mainsail nearly defeated us both. It refused to go up, while all we two able seamen seemed able to do was to fall, heavily and repeatedly, down. The foredeck was coated with wet and slippery mud, it was listed at an acute angle, and regularly every two seconds the whole boat shook with a shuddering jar that made any sort of foothold impossible. Why say more? The wonder is that we ever set that sail at all. But we did, and while we were doing it, oblivious to everything else in the world except the ultimate setting of that confounded sail, the boat must have somehow bumped and slid and wrenched herself over the bar; for we found, when at last we straightened our aching backs and looked around, that she was afloat again, and sailing.

Then we became aware of cries arising from aft. "Oh,

which way shall I push the stick. Which way? Which way?" It was the Lady in trouble with the steering, and, from the note of agony in her voice, she must have been in trouble for some time. "Look out! You'll jib. Put down your helm," we helpfully cried. "Which way? Which way?" the anguished answer came, and with it the crash and jerk and racket of a most healthy and full-blooded jib.

"Relieve the wheel," said George, "and keep her before the wind till I get a light in the binnacle and see where we're running to."

I steered the boat, it seemed for hours, while she rushed blindly through a night mysterious, wild and darker than the shades. "Keep your eye skinned," called George, wrestling still with matches in the cabin. "We don't want to knock a hole in any of the banks around here, and there are dozens of 'em, you know." As this perturbing piece of news was being imparted, I felt the Lady who Dances start. "There's something *there,*" she cried. "Look! Right in front of us. A low black line. What can it be?"

"Then jib her, quick!" said George, most suddenly appearing. "It's lucky our Lady can see in the dark, for that's the beach. I haven't a chart, and, anyhow, there's no oil in the lamp; so we'll keep her running along in sight of the shore, and in time we ought to connect with Clacton pier. I think there's lots of water."

The cheerful and casual methods adopted by George, when navigating in those difficult and tide-ridden waters so afflicted by shoals, impressed me. They were sketchy, perhaps, but most surprisingly adequate, for presently a strange enormous shape loomed in the black above us, and, "Pavilion on the pier," said George. "Bear up or you'll hit it." We had arrived!

Anchoring in the pier's inadequate lee, we drew the dinghy alongside, and looked at it. She was small—very small—and very full of water; but George opined that she would take us all "if you bail hard with the bucket." So we embarked, reluctantly, especially the Gent from Peking, who, though strongly reminiscent still of slipper-limpets, simply had to be carried. I know not how we reached the pier; I was far too busy bailing, and the credit is due to George alone for performing this final miracle. Banging and slithering amid encrusted piles we felt, by hand, for a landing-place which even the Lady who sees in the Dark could not make out in that Cimmerian darkness. Mr. Van Ping it was who finally showed us the way, for suddenly he sprang wildly out into the night, and we heard him then shaking himself exuberantly upon some platform invisible above us.

"Well, there you are," said George. "Safe ashore again. I'm sorry you feel you have got to go, but some day soon I hope you'll come for another little sail. I'll get back now and shove off for Harwich. Good-by, you three. I'm awfully glad we met."

And then George disappeared into the night. That was the last we saw of him, and we've never heard of him since. But one thing I am sure of, and that is that he fetched Harwich. I feel that if George made up his mind to it he could fetch Melbourne, say, in a small canoe. And what is more, he would be certain to enjoy his little sail.

In February it seems, to judge from its forlorn and desolate pier, Clacton is out of season; and later, whilst traversing the town in search of suitable wheeled transport, we felt very glad of this fact, for even a native population inured to the sartorial peculiarities of week-end trippers

proved able only to regard us with feelings of startled amazement, coupled with a glib derision which was very embarrassing indeed. Even the ancient, and therefore presumably experienced, Jehu of a battered car, as weathered as himself, could scarcely be induced to regard us as possible fares, and it was necessary to make it very clear that the adventure would prove to him most lucrative before he would permit us to embark on his rattling "randrydan."

"Wickilywick, you say. Yes, down in the marsh. I know it. I'll risk it—for two quid. But you'll *ruin* my cushions. 'Ere, sit on this nose-bag. And hold the dog on your lap *all* the way, mind, for 'e smells 'orrid. Fish, ain't it?"

And so at length we departed, rattling Wickilywickwards through the night, disturbing as we went, with our outrageous clamor, sleeping suburban Clactonites, blackbirds roosting in hedgy lanes, and mournful lapwings hiding in the marsh.

"I'm cold and I'm wet and very, very dirty. I've a bruise on all my corners, and I'm tired out. But somehow," said the Lady who Dances, "I'm happy. We've had a good day today, I think, don't you?"

"Perfect," said I. "I didn't know it could be done—in Essex. I've moved about the world a bit, and I've had some good days too; but there's a strange quaint flavor about this one that I've never met before. I'm not thinking of the limpets either."

And Mr. Van Ping seemed to agree with us, for just then he sat up and wagged his feathered tail.

Said I, "I only hope they aren't all worried to death about us. It's after one o'clock, and they'll be wondering what's happened. Search parties out all over the marsh, and the police called in, I expect."

Said the Lady, as we at last approached the farm, "They don't *seem* very excited. The house is all dark! I believe the callous beasts have calmly gone to bed."

They had, and our host alone arose to greet us. Awakened doubtless by the tumultuous whirring of our gears, he called from his bedroom window, "I say, did you take Van Ping? Ah, good. He's there. I was afraid he'd lost himself. The side door's open, children, and you'll find a cold duck and a ham and things in the hall. But I'm freezing. Good night, and God bless you."

When I got to bed at last I lay awake a little while thinking about things. "It's the queerest country in all the world," I thought, "with the very quaintest people. Yes. All these years I've been wasting my time; but I'm home again at last—and I mean to stay here."

And as I fell most peacefully asleep I whispered to myself, "*Dear* England."

## VII

## WHITE POISON

I'm feeling fine now, thanks, Cap'n. I guess I was about all in yesterday when you found me; but it never seems to take *me* long to get on my feet again. I'm full of your good grub now, and I've pretty near slept the clock round. And if you'll pass across that bottle, it won't be long before I'm as right as rain.

I must be pretty tough, though, to have stood what I've been through. I've lost count of the time, of course, but I must have been drifting around in that flaming canoe for over a week before you sighted me. Yes. I don't mind saying that if you hadn't happened along yesterday and picked me up, I should most likely have been dead meat by now. I must have been pretty far gone, I think, or I'd surely have seen this schooner coming up as soon as it got light. I'd been spending most of my time before that looking out for a sail; but I never saw a sign of anything, and I knew I was away off all the usual sailing tracks. So yesterday, I suppose I just chucked my hand in. As a matter of fact, I was lying in the bottom of the canoe, wishing I was dead, and hoping it wouldn't take long; and when I heard your crowd hailing me, close aboard like that, it gave me such a start I nearly capsized the blame canoe. I tell you, Cap., the sight of this schooner of yours right alongside of me, all sudden and unexpected, knocked the wind clean out of me, and all I could do for a bit was just sit there and stare at

her like a fool with my mouth open. I guess you must have thought I'd gone queer in the head. But I was glad to see you all right. Yes. You can say I was mighty glad to see you—push across that bottle.

That's good gin—if I'm any judge, that is; because it's over two years now since I tasted anything bar water and cocoanut toddy. Think of that! Two whole perishing years cut off from all a white man needs. I've been—I've found—— But you listen to me, close, and I'll tell you.

Can the hand at the wheel hear what's said down in this cabin? Then—shut the hatch. Now, see here. When you picked me up I wasn't the only one that was lucky. You were in luck too. Because, you see, I'm *on* to something. D'you understand? I'm on to something *good*. It's not trade and it's not copra; but there's a pile in it. A big pile, too, by gum, and it's big enough for the two of us. Which is lucky, for, the way things have turned out, it looks as if I'd got to let you into the thing. I've got the knowledge and you've got the schooner. I can't do much without a schooner, and I'll own up to it. But don't you forget it, you can't do anything either without me. So it'll have to be halves. Share and share alike, and I owe you something anyway for picking me up. I'll just have to trust you and risk getting left with the dirty end of the stick; but, if you'll shake hands on the half share business—well, I'll chance it and tell you.

Right! That's fine. Now we're partners. And how about another drink on the strength of it. And I want to tell you, pard, you've just done the best bit of business you'll ever do in your life. You don't know it, and I'll admit I don't look much like it now; but when you picked me up yesterday you picked up a fine fat fortune too. And if a lagoon that nobody knows of but me, and that's chock-full of pearl oysters—well, if that isn't a fortune, I'll trouble you to tell me what is. Yes.

It's a pile all right, and half of it's yours if you'll take me back there.

Well, blow me! if you don't take the thing pretty cool. I suppose, though, you don't believe me. And that's natural enough when I come to think of it, for a man doesn't get a virgin pearl lagoon handed to him on a plate like this every day, and that's a fact. But that's just what I'm handing you now. A half of it anyway. But I see I'll have to tell you the whole thing—how it happened, and how I came to find the place. I'll tell it you right from the start, and then I'll bet you believe me all right.

I'm Body, I am. Jim Body, and—before I piled her up on the atoll I'm telling you about—I was owner and skipper of the schooner *Tropic Bird*. It's well over two years now since we left Rapa, and I was full right up to the beams that trip with shell and copra. We were bound for Auckland, but I kept away to the nor'ard a bit at first, meaning to run my westing down on the edge of the Trades in about twenty-four degrees South. At the start we did fine. The Trade was fresh and well out of the sou'-east, right over the quarter, so in five days we'd run nearly eight hundred miles. That put us right in the middle of nowhere, as you'll see if you look at the chart. There's no land round there at all, except Rarotonga, away and gone to the north, and those blame Haymet Rocks that nobody knows where they are for certain, and are even down on the charts E.D.[1] Well, doubtful or not, I didn't want to chance hitting 'em, so I looked up the Admiralty Sailing Directions to see what they'd got to say. They said a lot, but it didn't help me much, because it seems the only man who's ever seen those rocks is Haymet himself. They've been searched for since, and nobody's seen a sign of 'em. But they're there, all right. There or there-

[1] E.D. = existence doubtful.

abouts. Because that Haymet didn't only see 'em—he hit 'em! And so I was wondering if I hadn't better keep away to the nor'ard and give the place a wide berth, when I happened to read something else in the Directions which made me sit up and take notice. If you'll hand me the book there —Pacific Islands, Eastern Groups it is—I'll show you the very words which started the trouble. Look! Page twenty-six. Here it is. "Bank," it says. "A depth of sixty-eight fathoms, rock, was found by the *Fabert* in latitude twenty-four degrees seven minutes South, longitude a hundred fifty-eight degrees thirty-three minutes West. This vessel was at the time searching for a low island which had been reported to exist in this neighborhood, but of which she saw nothing." There! It's a good two years since I read that, but I remember it all plain still. "A low island reported to exist in this neighborhood." A lost island that didn't belong to nobody. And, if I could find it, it would belong to me! I'd just worked out my noon sight, and it put me about sixty miles to the north-eastward of where that island was supposed to be. And so—well, who wouldn't? I altered course to sou'-west, and sent a hand aloft into the fore spreaders with orders to keep his eyes peeled. I didn't really expect to sight anything, but there was a chance, and I thought, as I was around that way, I might just as well have a look-see.

Well, we didn't sight a thing. We'd run our distance before it got dark, when there wasn't anything in sight from aloft at all. I went up myself to make sure. So then I made up my mind that if there *was* a new island knocking about, it wasn't in the place we were looking for it. I didn't feel like losing any more time either, and, to tell you the truth, I was beginning to feel a bit of a fool by then for having run so far off my course already. So I bore away to the west'ard again and turned in.

I don't know what time it was when we hit the place. All I can say is it was mighty dark when we struck. I was pitched clean out of my bunk, and I brought up with my head against something hard enough to knock me clean out. Then, I suppose, a green sea must have come in down the companion because, when I came to, the cabin was full of water, and I was pretty near drowned. It was the feel of the water, though, that brought me round, and then I crawled up out of there quick. When I got on deck I could tell at once the schooner was done for. There was a biggish sea running, and she was bashing and grinding on the coral something horrid. Both masts were down and lying in a tangle of gear on the foredeck, and I think the mess must have jammed the fo'c'sle hatch and trapped the watch below. I sang out, but nobody answered, so I guessed the same sea which roused me must have washed the mate and the hand at the wheel overboard. Then another sea broke aboard and took charge of me, and the next thing I knew I was clear of the schooner and swimming about in the dark. It was as black as the innards of a cow, and I couldn't see much of anything; but when something hit me in the mouth, I grabbed it and found I'd got hold of one of our hatch-covers. There wasn't much I could do then, of course, except hang on and drift and wait for daylight, so I just hung on and waited. But I want to tell you that was a perishing long wait. Yes. I don't want to have to wait so long again for anything. It seemed as if I was adrift out there for weeks; but it couldn't have been so very long, because I found out afterwards the reef the schooner struck on was less than a mile to wind'ard of the atoll, and, when the light came at last, there I was, only a couple of hundred yards from the shore. There was a mighty nasty surf breaking on the beach that I didn't like the look of at all.

I could see I'd get smashed up if I tried to land there; and when I noticed the current was carrying me along the shore, I made up my mind to wait until I'd drifted abreast of some place where the sea wasn't breaking so bad. The sea was running big, you understand, all the time, and every now and again I'd get washed off that hatch of mine, and I'd have the devil's own job getting back to it again. However, I daren't face that surf on the beach, so I had to stick it out where I was and wait for something to turn up.

After a goodish while I noticed I was drifting up to a break in the shore line, and it wasn't long before it opened up, and I could see it was the entrance into a lagoon. I knew then, if only the tide was on the flood, that I was all right; but if it was ebbing, I'd be done for, because the water runs out through most of those lagoon entrances like a regular race, and I was scared I might be out of luck and get caught in it and carried right out to sea. The entrance opened out slowly all the while, and every time a sea'd lift me I could look right into that lagoon. It was as calm as a pond in there, all quiet and peaceful, and the water was shining in the sun and colored like the inside of a pearl shell. And I can tell you that beach inside looked mighty good to me. I was so close in I could see the little ripples just lapping on the sand, and there I was outside, getting bashed about by those damned great breakers that burst on the seaward shore with such a roar and a crash that it looked, by God, as if they were trying to smash up the whole island. I was all in by that time, too, and if I'd been a praying sort, I guess I'd have prayed just then for something to come and get me clear of those seas and carry me into that quiet lagoon where it all looked so calm and safe.

But I got in all right—without having to do any praying

either. For my luck was in. The tide was on the flood; and when the current got hold of me it just sucked me through that entrance at the rate of knots. One minute I was being knocked about by the seas outside, and the next there I was, floating in the calm water, all safe and comfortable, with the land and the cocoanut trees closing in all around me. And you can bet your sweet life I was mighty pleased to be there.

Well, there you are. That's how I discovered the island. It's a low island, and just like every other atoll you've ever seen, except that there isn't a trader or a tin roof, or even a missionary or a bottle of good liquor in the whole place. So, you can see, it was a real savage island I'd come across that'd never been civilized, and I saw at once I was the first white man who'd ever been there. There was a canoe with with some Kanakas in it fishing, and they spotted me as soon as I drifted in. Great big, hefty, smiling beggars they were, and one of them lifted me into that canoe as if I was a baby. And I weigh pretty near two hundred pounds, which'll show you the strength of the brutes. They made all manner of fuss over me. Rubbed me down to get the blood running again, and knocked off the top of a green nut and gave me a swig at it. They seemed pleased, too, about finding me, but I could see my white skin surprised them some. They couldn't seem to get over the color of me, and I think it was my red hair that puzzled the beggars most. Anyhow, it was plain they'd never seen any one like me before. When they got me ashore all hands was lined up on the beach, shouting; and they laughed and patted me on the back and carried on generally as if I was welcome and they was glad to see me. All but the kids, that is. It's funny, but if I as much as looked at a kid it'd give a squeal and clear out of there as if it thought I was going to eat it. The men

weren't bashful, though, by a long chalk. They all handled me and stroked me down as if they thought I wasn't real; but when they began to feel my hair and pat me on the head, I hauled off and showed 'em pretty quick I didn't want any of that. You see, I thought I'd better show them right off it wouldn't do for any darned natives to make free that way with a white man.

The thing that struck me most at first was the size of the beggars. I'm a big man myself, as you can see, but the most of that crowd were a long way bigger than I am. It's a fact. And there wasn't a sick or weak-looking nigger amongst the lot; and none of that damned coughing or even a sign of any of those nasty-looking sores on 'em like you see all over the rest of the islands now. They had a look about them as though they might have been some sort of Samoans once; but they were all much bigger and more cheerful and healthy than any Kanaka you'll find round about Apia or Pango Pango these days. And I remember I thought to myself then that, if I could only get some of that crowd on to a plantation, they'd make the finest lot of labor a man could wish to have the handling of. Well, we'll handle the beggars yet, you and I will, partner. I guess we'll show 'em. And don't forget I've got a thirst that's over two years in the pickling. Give that bottle a fair wind.

Well, as I'm telling you, there I was, marooned on an island that wasn't even down on the charts, and with a darned slim chance of ever getting off the place again. The chap who'd picked me up—Falapa his name was—he took charge of me. And he seemed to like the job. He took me to his hut, and from the way he went on it was easy to see he meant me to make myself at home there. So I did. I had a good feed, and then I turned in on his pile of mats and slept like a dead man. Next morning I walked round

to the wind'ard side of the island to see if there was anything left of the schooner. There wasn't a sign of her. She'd broken up on that off-shore reef and gone altogether. There wasn't a splinter of her left, not even a bit of wreckage drifted up on the beach. And none of the hands had come ashore either. They was all drowned but me. Or else the sharks got 'em, because none of them ever showed up —not even as stiff 'uns. Well, they weren't much good, anyway; none of 'em, but it broke me up a bit to think I'd seen the last of the old *Tropic Bird*. I'd had that schooner pretty nigh ten years, and I was kind of fond of her. She handled as easy as a bird, to—but what's the use of talking?

I sat on the beach for a goodish bit, thinking things out, with that big fool of a Falapa rubbing my back—that being his way, I suppose, of trying to show he was sorry. So I cleared him to blazes out of that, and then I did some hard thinking. I felt kind of down on my luck for a bit, and it looked as if there I was, properly cast away and done for; but it wasn't so long before I'd got it figured out that the best thing I could do was to make the most of things for myself on the island. So I took a walk round to see what was doing. It's a smallish atoll, about twelve feet high at most, and, except for a stretch of half-tide reef on the west, it's all covered over with cocoanut palms. It's only two or three hundred yards across it from beach to beach; but all the same it must be nearly fifteen miles long, because it's bent round the lagoon like a frame around a looking-glass, and the lagoon's about five miles long by three wide. There's two villages—Falapa's, and one on the other side of the lagoon, and between the two of them there's a couple of hundred niggers all told. And they're the queerest lot of Kanakas I've ever seen. What strikes you first is the size

and healthy looks of the brutes. And, though you won't hardly believe me, I couldn't find a sick or an undersized nigger on the whole island. Nor any very old ones either, which seemed queer; but I found out afterwards why that was. They didn't seem to know what sickness meant, and it seems the only way they ever did die was by accident, like getting drowned or falling out of a tree or something. And when that happened, they'd put the corpse in a canoe with a lot of green cocoanuts and the chap's fishing-gear and cooking-pots and so on. They'd rig up a small square sail in the bows of the thing, and then launch the whole business, corpse and all, from the loo'ard side of the island. It'd go sailing off down wind, of course, right out to sea before the Trade wind, and that'd be the end of that funeral. Well, that was all right. That was as handy a way of getting rid of a corpse as burying it; but what got me was to find that those blame savages would do the same thing to any one who happened to get hurt bad, such as breaking a leg or anything like that. If he didn't heal up or the chap looked like pegging out, then adrift he'd have to go, just as if he was dead already. There was a girl, too —a bit after I got there that was—who cut her foot on the reef, and the coral must have poisoned it. Her leg swelled up big, and I guess maybe she was booked anyway; but she wasn't dead by a long shot when they triced her up and sent her sailing off in a canoe to the west'ard. I raised a fuss about that, because I'd been kind of keeping my eye on that girl—Fa'ala was worth looking at. But for all I could do it wasn't any good. She had to go. The queer thing was that all of them, including the girl herself, seemed mighty surprised at me kicking up a row about that business. Their notion was, as far as I could make out from Falapa's jabbering, that if you were sick or dying, the

natural place to get on with the job was out at sea by yourself, and not on the island. Because the island, according to them, was a place made for good things only, and not for anything bad or rotten. But as they use the same word for "sick" and "bad," it wasn't easy to make out what it was exactly they were getting at.

Anyway, that's what happened. It was pretty bad, but it wasn't the worst by a long way, as I soon found out. If you'll believe me, those beggars are that savage they actually set their old men and women adrift too. As soon as one of them shows signs of getting too old and feeble, then he's for it. There's a bit of a ceremony like, and then he or she, or whoever it is, is tied up and set adrift, and that's the end of it. And the queer thing is, the most of them don't seem to mind it. They none of them made any fuss or a fight for it, and just took it quite natural and quiet. It's queer, and it's only over the babies that there's sometimes a bit of a fuss. It's the mothers that make it. And most of the kids that get born on that atoll get set adrift. They only keep the big strong ones, and all the rest have to go for a sail. Nobody ever comes back, of course, for those canoes ain't exactly what you'd call seaworthy. They go sailing off down wind, and I guess the first squall that comes along does for 'em. And you'd hardly believe those beggars'd do a thing like that unless you've seen it like I have, because in other ways they're the quietest, happiest, gentlest-hearted lot of niggers I ever saw anywhere. You never see them having a row amongst themselves, and as for scrapping—well, it's my belief they don't know how to. They never do fight anyway, or show any signs of wanting to, either. And that's all to the good, because, as I've told you already, they'll make the easiest kind of labor to handle a man could wish for.

The language they use is as much like Samoan as anything; and, knowing Samoan, it wasn't long before I could talk to 'em pretty well as good as I can to you now. And one of the first things I did was to try to get the hang of this trick of theirs of burying a man alive, as you might say, in a canoe. I wanted to get at the why and wherefore of the thing, you understand, because I could see myself falling sick or something one day maybe, and getting cast adrift myself. And I didn't like the thought of it. I tackled Falapa about it, but I couldn't get him, or any one else, to tell me much that amounted to anything. It seems it's something to do with their brand of religion, and all I could make out is that they think a sick person or a corpse, or even a very old man, ain't natural or healthy, and so they get rid of them accordingly. But about the kids it's a bit different. As Falapa said, there isn't much room on the island anyway, and if they kept all the babies that were born there the place would get crowded. So they get rid of them like I told you. Which'll show you that, in spite of their gentle ways and not fighting and so on, they're black savages all right, and'll do things that'll fair turn the stomach of a white man to think of.

They're a lazy bunch, too. They won't work unless they have to. They're happy enough as they are, so why worry? That seems to be the way they see it. About all they eat is fish and cocoanuts, and all they've got to do when they want some grub or anything is just to reach out and get it. It's a soft life all right, and when I got there first I didn't even have to reach. When I wanted anything a dozen of 'em would run off quick and fetch it. I lived in Falapa's hut, and the fool couldn't seem to do enough for me. You might say he turned himself out of his hut to make room for me, and he and his women looked after me as though

I was some blame baby. It was all right; but after two or three months of that I began to get restless. It wasn't the grub, because I had plenty of that, and what I had was good. Fish and cocoanuts don't sound much, I know, but the different ways they'd cook the stuff made it seem as if I had something different to eat every blessed meal. No, the grub was all right. What I needed was some baccy, and I'd have given my bally soul and welcome for one good swig of any drink that had a bit of a kick to it. Water and cocoanut milk was all they drank, and the water was salty anyway. And while cocoanut milk's all right at first, it doesn't take you long to get sick of the sight of it. If there's any other strong liquor within range, I naturally wouldn't walk across the room to get a drink of cocoanut toddy; but when toddy's all there is to be got it ain't so bad. A man can get cheerful on it anyway. So I tackled Falapa to see if he could get hold of some, or knew how to make it. He didn't understand what I was driving at, though, so I had to bear a hand myself. I got some green nuts and fermented the juice, and the brew was coming on fine, when Falapa got on to what I was up to. And you should have seen the fuss the beggar made then! He actually tried to stop me. He was scared stiff, too, because it turns out there's a mighty strict taboo against making toddy at all. Can you beat it? Those blame niggers had got it into their thick skulls that a man with a drink or two inside him is as bad as if he's broken his leg or got some sickness. And what's more, it turns out that, if any one *did* get drunk, he was for it. I mean, they'd lash him up as I've told you, and set him adrift the same as if he was dead. Well, when I heard that I'll admit it made me a bit thoughtful. I've never let any blame silly taboo stop me from doing anything I wanted to do yet, but all the same I saw I'd have to

be careful. After that I'll own I judged it wise to make my bit of a brew on the quiet, and I only drank at night when all hands was turned in, so I don't think any of 'em tumbled to what I was up to. Falapa spotted the game, of course; but he kept his head shut, and didn't let on to anybody. That nigger had taken a shine to me or something, I suppose, and didn't want to see me in trouble. I had to be careful, but I managed to get all I needed to drink one way and another, and it made life a bit more bearable.

But I reckon what you're waiting to hear about is the shell. As I told you, the lagoon's plum full of it. Which is only natural, as the stuff has never been touched at all. The beggars do a bit of diving for it sometimes, but that's only when they feel like a feed of oysters. For they don't know enough yet, you understand, to see that it's the shell that's worth money. And you can believe me I took good care not to tell 'em either. If they like to think that the only thing worth having about a pearl oyster is the meat—well, good enough. That's where you and I come in, pard. We know better. And that place is just lousy with shell. It's all prime stuff, too, and there must be enough there to keep this schooner running full for years—if we can only manage to keep the place to ourselves, that is. There's pearls there, too, of course. I've seen Falapa break a tooth on one the size of a gooseberry, and the beggar just cussed a bit. And he says, "That's the trouble with oysters. They taste good, but they've got stones hidden in 'em that you've got to watch out you don't bite on." Can you beat it? Well, that'll show you what they think about pearls, and you can judge what sort of a proposition it is I'm letting you on to. Why, I think maybe, if we go about the job properly, we'll

be able to clean up a pile on the pearls alone, without bothering much about the shell.

The funny thing is, it didn't strike me for months that the place was as good as a gold-mine to me. It all belonged to me, of course, because I was the first white man to find it; but I'll admit I was a bit slow to see there was a big pile of cash coming to me if I ever managed to get in touch with civilization again. I'd been living pretty soft up to then, and not worrying about things much; but when I got on to the fact that, if only I could get away with it, I was a rich man—why, then I got busy. The first idea I had was to rig up a canoe and make her seaworthy, and sail her west in the hope of making Tongo or somewhere. The canoes they had were no good for a trip like that, as you'll have seen for yourself, because the one you picked me up out of was a sample. If I hadn't had the darnedest luck and fine weather all the time, I'd never have kept her afloat as long as I did. Well, I did what I could to make a shipshape looking craft out of one of the things, but it didn't take me long to see it wasn't any use. I hadn't the tools or the timber to make a real job out of a canoe, so I had to give up the notion of getting myself off the island.

When I got on to the fact that I was stuck on the place for good and all unless a ship happened to turn up, I got a bit mad about things. You'd have been the same yourself. There was I, with all that shell and pearls belonging to me, worth thousands, and I couldn't do a darn thing about it. It was like being locked up inside the blooming Bank of England. It would have made any one feel savage. It did me; and for a bit I guess I raised Cain. And then I had another idea. I built some big fires and made such a smoke that I knew anything passing within twenty miles of the

place was bound to sight it. I did the thing properly. I turned on Falapa and the rest of the crowd, and made 'em keep those fires burning good and smoky. I told 'em off into regular watches, four hours on and four off, all shipshape, and they kept my fires going fine, night and day. At first the beggars seemed to like it. Thought it was some sort of a game, I reckon. But after a bit it began to look too much like work to them, and they chucked it. So then I had to start right in and show the brutes who was boss. I'd made up my mind those fires had got to be kept alight, and I manhandled a lot of those niggers properly, trying to make 'em do it. But it wasn't any use. They'd struck, you might say. And they didn't even put up a decent scrap about it to make things interesting. Just knocked off and cleared out. But I showed 'em, at any rate, there was one man on the island willing and able to fight for what he wanted, and, I tell you, I surprised 'em. I gave them a proper lesson, and I guess they know enough now to respect a white man when they see one, especially if he's got red hair. It wasn't any good, though, for all I could do to them. They wouldn't work, and knocking 'em about didn't seem to help at all, which was queer.

After a bit the beggars began to give me a wide berth, and I had to let my fires out, because I couldn't keep them going by myself, and even Falapa jibbed at stoking them. I caught a sort of cold about then, too, and didn't feel so good for a day or so. I must have got into a sweat, I suppose, after the scrapping I'd had to do, and I know I had a powerful thirst on me when it was all over. Anyhow, I put away quite a load of toddy that night. And that fool Falapa must have let me lie out on the beach all night instead of getting me under cover as usual. When I woke up I was shivering and coughing, and I had a real nasty head

on me. And I reckon, maybe, I had a touch of fever. It knocked me out for a little—perhaps a day, or maybe two or three days. I don't know. All I remember is Falapa and the women fussing about at first and bothering me, when all I wanted was to be left quiet. And then, when I came to, and felt better, blow me if there was one of the swine handy, not even to fetch me a drink of water. I wanted that drink bad, and I sung out for it. But nobody answered —at least nothing to amount to anything, for all I could hear was groans. So I got up. I was shaky on my pins still; but I got up and had a look round. And what do you think I found? Why, hang me, if the whole crowd weren't down with the fever too! Every blessed son of a gun in that hut —Falapa and all—down and out, and all of 'em coughing and moaning away like a lot of sick cows. You never saw anything like it. I couldn't find any water in the hut either. Not a drop, nor even a green nut. The greedy beggars had got the lot, and there wasn't a thing left for me. It was a nuisance, because, weak as I was, I had to go and rustle for myself. I was glad to get out of that hut, though. Some of them were dead already, and Falapa and the rest were groaning and rolling their eyes and singing out for water as if there wasn't any one else in the place with a thirst. So I cleared out o' there and got a drink for myself, and then I had a look round.

I thought, as soon as I got outside the hut, that there was something mighty queer about the village. I didn't take much notice at first, because I was set on getting that drink, you understand. I needed it. But when I'd had it I felt a lot better, and then I saw at once it was no wonder things looked rum. For, stiffen me, if the whole blessed village wasn't down and out too! You won't hardly believe it, but there wasn't more than one or two of 'em left who

could so much as crawl. It's a fact. It knocked me, and at first I was scared. You see, I didn't know what had struck them. I looked into one or two huts, and the beggers inside were all in about the same state as in Falapa's. When I looked in they'd see me, and start singing out. All of them that weren't dead, that is. They wanted water mostly. But what could I do? I couldn't nurse the whole damned village. And, besides, I wasn't sure then what sort of illness it was they'd got. It might have been only the fever they'd caught; but from the way it had laid 'em out, how was I to know it wasn't smallpox or cholera or something like that. So I cleared out of there, and for the next few weeks I lived by myself on the wind'ard beech, where no one ever went much at the best of times. And during the time the fever was running through the island I hardly ever saw a soul. I had a thin time, I can tell you, fishing and doing for myself and trying to climb those flaming cocoanut trees. It was all I could do to keep myself alive, let alone any one else.

Well—anyhow, after a bit the sickness began to blow over, and the people started to get on their legs again. Those that had managed to get through it alive, that is, because half of the beggars had copped it for good and all. I should think about fifty men in our village had snuffed out, and the other village had caught it pretty nigh as bad. They'd had a doing all right; and you never saw such a crowd of bally wrecks as that bunch when the fever had done with 'em. They seemed to take a mighty long time getting over it too. Not like me, they weren't. For all their size and healthy looks, I guess they haven't the guts in 'em a white man has. It only took me about a few days before I was up and doing and as fit as be damned again; but

most of those birds were crawling about like a lot of sick sheep for a week and more afterwards.

When I judged it was safe I went back to the village again, for you can understand I was fed up by then with roosting by myself on the beach. Falapa and most of his lot had pegged out, but one of the women and a couple of boys were still in the hut. They looked pretty sick still; but they were getting over it all right, and I judged they'd be able to look after me again, so I settled down and took charge.

And then I got a surprise. As soon as I walked in, that woman and the two kids legged it as if I'd been Old Nick himself. And I'll be shot if I could get 'em to come back again either! I couldn't understand it, and I was mad about it too. You'd have been. I wanted some of them, I didn't care who, to rustle some grub, and cook and look after the place like they'd done for me before. But, hang me if I could get a single soul to as much as look at me. It's queer, but they all seemed scared to death of me; and all they'd do, when I got talking to 'em, was run away. It was rum, and I tried hard to find out what was up. But there was nothing doing, and none of 'em would come within yards of me. I couldn't find out what was up; and, to tell you the truth, I don't know yet.

And now, here's the queerest part of the whole business. What had come over them beats me; but that very night, after I'd given 'em up and turned in, I'll be shot if the swine didn't wait till I was asleep, and then the whole boiling set on me! I came to with about two dozen of 'em sitting on me, and the rest were holding on to my arms and legs. I made a fight for it, of course. I did what I could, and I bet I've left my mark on a good few of the beggars.

But scrap as I would, it wasn't any use. There were too many of 'em, and it wasn't long before they'd got me triced up so tight that I couldn't hardly wriggle a toe, let alone move hand or foot. The swine did the job properly, there's no doubt about that. They'd got me where they wanted me, and they weren't taking any chances of my getting myself loose. At first I hadn't a notion what it was they had in their minds to do with me; but when they lifted me up and carried me down to the beach, all triced up like some damned bag of copra, then I began to see a light. They dumped me into a canoe that was half-full of green cocoanuts, with a little square sail rigged up forward, and—well, then I knew what it was all about. It was my funeral they were busy on!

Now, if you'll tell me what made the beggars do that to me I'll thank you. I'd like to know. I've puzzled over it since, but I can't make it out at all. It beats me. If I'd been dying or sick, or broken my leg or something, I could understand it. But there I was, the strongest healthiest man in the whole island by a long way. And yet, there they were, treating me just as if I was dead. Yes, damn them. From the hurry they were in to get shot of me you'd have thought I was dead already—*and* stinkin'. Yes. The swine buried me! They shoved me off the beach and left me to drift off out to sea—to rot. They buried me—but I'm not dead yet. No. Not by a long shot. And when I get back there again they'll soon find that out, you believe me. *I'll* show them they can't play their heathen games on a white man that way. Let 'em wait awhile. I'm still alive—*and* kicking. As a matter of fact, I started to kick as soon as they shoved me off the beach. I was seized up good and tight, as I've told you; but, before it got light, I'd chewed through all the lashings I could get at, and so it wasn't

long before I got loose. The canoe had run away off to loo'ard of the island, of course, by that time, and I couldn't see a sign of the land when it got light. And I couldn't have beat back to the place again against the wind, even if I'd wanted to, so I kept her going west and started to take stock of what I'd got aboard in the way of grub and gear. For a start, there was about forty green nuts; and that was all to the good, for there's both food and drink in them, and I thought they'd keep me going for a week or two if need be. And then they'd put in my fishing-gear and a pot or so, as was usual; so I figured out, if only I could keep afloat, I wouldn't do so bad after all, and with luck I might manage to get myself ashore again somewhere yet. So I kept the canoe sailing dead before the wind. I kept her at it night and day. It was all there was to do. And it may not sound much, talking about it now; but I want you to know it was just plain hell from the very start, and it got worse all the time. None of it was what you'd call fun; but it was the sun mostly I couldn't stick. I hadn't a hat, or much on me in the way of clothes, as you'll have seen, so I fairly fried *and* boiled. And every time that night 'd come I'd be surprised, because, you see, I didn't expect to keep alive that long. And yesterday, I guess, it had got a bit too much, even for me. And if you hadn't turned up like you did, I think by this time I'd have passed in my checks for good. However—hell, here I am, fit and hearty yet. And when I get back—— But look here! We're wasting time. Why, here we are, running off to the west'ard, away from the island, and we ought to have had this schooner hard on a wind and beating back as soon as I got aboard her. Turn out the hands, man, right away, and get this old packet close-hauled as soon as you know how. Lord! the way we're going now we're running away from both our for-

tunes. Put her on the wind quick, and let's get back to the island.

And when we do get back we'll have to start right in and show those brutes they've got to forget their savage notions and take to decent white man's ways. We'll turn 'em to, all of 'em, diving for our shell. They won't want to at first, I guess, but we'll just have to make them. When you come to think of it, it's doing 'em a kindness after all. They're savage, ignorant, lazy brutes, and so we'll have to teach 'em that sort of thing won't do nowadays. They're just plain savages, you can't deny that, and it's our job to get 'em civilized as soon as we can, and teach 'em to work, like the rest of us have to. The best thing will be to try 'em with the liquor first. You know—the old game. Give 'em some to start with, and then, when they've got the taste for it, if they want any more they'll have to pay for it—with the pearls. And if that doesn't work we'll have to shoot a few to show 'em who's top dog. Perhaps it'd be best to do that first anyway. There's nothing like a little blood-letting for pumping sense into a crowd like that. They need civilizing bad. And I feel I'm the right sort to do it. So you leave it to me. *I'll* soon spread the light.

## VIII

## AN ERROR OF JUDGMENT

No, sir! No more big fine ships for me. I don't want 'em. I'm skipper of this old tramp and I'm comfortable. She suits me all right; and I say that any man that'd growl at this job and want to get on a passenger boat doesn't know when he's well off. I've had some. I was master once in the San Francisco-Sydney Line, on the old *Samoa,* and what with the trouble of keeping the old girl running to time, and the fuss with the mails and dressing up for dinner every blessed night, *and* the passengers—, well, I got fed up with it, right to the gills, and cleared out. As a matter of fact, I was fired. And I'm glad of it—now, although at the time it shook me up a bit. Oh, yes, I deserved what I got, all right, I suppose. You see, I—well, you might say I made a bit of an error of judgment, and, at sea, if you do that, you're done.

By the way, you're a yachtsman. Did you ever hear tell of a fellow called Winton? Well, I'll tell you about him, for it was due to his foolishness in the first place—and then mine—that I got fired.

It happened, as I said, when I had command of the *Samoa;* and that old packet was the slowest ship on the run. She always gave us a job of it, getting her across on time; and on the trip I'm telling you about we made a slower passage than usual, for we had to cut out one boiler, soon after leaving Sydney, owing to leaky tubes. And then,

when we walked into the sou'east trades, we found 'em blowing dead out of the east'ard, unusually strong, and we lost another full day coming through them. When we crossed the Line we were 'way behind time, and it meant shoving the old girl along for all she was worth for the rest of the passage if we wanted to save a riot about the mails when we did arrive at 'Frisco.

When we picked up the north-east trades we found 'em very light—which was luck for us, for it's a long plug across there with a dead headwind, and if there had been any strength to 'em, that would have put the lid on us. All the same, I was kept worried and wondering all the time—which is what generally happens in mail boats.

Well, anyhow, to get on with it: one afternoon, about four bells, I was just coming to from my usual bit of a nap when I hear a hail from the look-out for'ard. "Sail-o on the starboard bow!" he sings out. I didn't take much stock of it at the moment, except to think to myself that this was the first time we had ever sighted anything on that bit of the passage since I'd been on the run. It's a mighty empty piece of water round about there, and, beyond our regular monthly boats, I suppose there were blamed few ships that ever went anywhere near that particular part of the world. This was the precise reason I'd given orders to my watch officers to keep an extra good look-out, and I always kept a hand in the crow's nest while we were going through there. I know the mates used to think it just a piece of the Old Man's foolishness, keeping a special look-out in a place that was notorious for never having anything in it; but these young fellers don't know everything, and they'd never been adrift for two weeks in a ship's lifeboat, like I had.

They don't know what it feels like to see a ship come

up in broad daylight and draw abeam and then watch her steam right on and leave you. That's what happened to me and the *Lena's* crowd, after she'd burnt up from under us and we had to take to the boats. Five days afterwards a steamer went past within six miles—and never saw us, just because some lubber on her bridge wouldn't take the trouble to have a look round now and again. Because he'd made up his mind beforehand there wouldn't be anything to see, I suppose. We took off our shirts and waved 'em, and yelled and cursed—and wept, some of us—and that swine just held straight on and on, and steamed out of sight and left us. I tell you, you don't forget a thing like that, and I made up my mind then that it wouldn't be for want of looking if a ship I was master of passed a boat-load of poor beggars cast adrift on the high seas. I'm a bit touched on that point; but I always intend to stick to it. Yes—*even now*.

Well, as I say, I heard the look-out hail the bridge, and the Second sung out, "*All* right," as much as to say he'd seen everything there was to see hours ago, when, as a matter of fact, I could bet he'd been keeping his eye on the girls on the promenade deck instead of on the job. However, I stayed where I was, for I expected the boy up with my cup of tea in a minute or two, and time enough to take a look at the other ship when we'd brought her abeam. But just then, down comes the Second off the bridge in a hurry. He says he'd sighted something off to starboard, and, from the look of her through the long glass, he thought she was a ship's boat, and should he steer for her, and so on.

Naturally, I went up on the bridge to take a look, and there, about four miles off, was a small white boat under sail. Well, a small boat knocking about in *that* part of

the world could only mean one thing—some ship had been in trouble—so I altered course at once and stood for her. In a bit I could make out a man in her, and he was waving something, and through the glass I could see the American ensign at the masthead. It was hoisted union down. In twenty minutes we were close up, and you should have seen our passengers. They were a sight. I wasn't what you might call altogether calm myself, for I knew what the birds in that boat must be feeling like, seeing us coming up. But our passengers seemed to have gone quite nutty. They were lining the rail, cheering and waving and going on foolish, as passengers always do whenever anything out of the ordinary turns up at sea. We must have looked a perfect sight from the boat, with all those idiots making a show of us; but the man aboard her (and I could only see one) seemed to be taking it cool enough.

Now, I hadn't forgotten we were late with the mails, and I didn't propose to waste any more time than I could help over the rescue business. I had a hand standing by for'ard with a line, and a ladder over the side with a quartermaster at the bottom of it, all ready to make a quick job. I steamed up pretty close, went full astern on both engines and brought the old ship up, close to wind-'ard of the boat, in great style. Then I hailed the fellow to come alongside us as quick as he could. Those confounded passengers were making such a riot that I couldn't make out what he called back, except that he kept on saying something about "water."

It took him a devil of a time to get alongside, too. I know we blanketed what little wind there was from him, but, all the same, he put up a poor job of it making our ladder. What with all the people yelling, and the time I was losing, and one thing and another, I admit I got pretty

mad. But after messing about for what seemed to me hours, he did at last manage to drift against the ladder, and my quartermaster climbed aboard him and hung on. The chap in the boat stood up, and I must say he didn't look so far gone as I thought he would be. He had a two weeks' beard all over his face and generally looked pretty moldy, but he was strong and hearty enough apparently; and he waved his hand and grinned at that row of silly faces stuck out over our rail, all cheering and carrying on like perfect idiots.

I said a few things to the passengers through the megaphone, and I must have sprung some extra fine remarks which touched the spot, for I got quiet at last and could hear myself speak. I hailed the boat and asked how many there were aboard, and the feller sings out, "I'm the only one, Captain, I need water!"

"All right, my lad, all right. We'll fix you up," I said. "If you can climb that ladder, come aboard; and you'd better bring anything you want with you, for I'm in a hurry."

"Thank you, Captain," says he, and he came up the side in great shape; and, will you believe it, the moment he touched the deck, those bally passengers broke out again. They cheered and they patted him on the back; and although he was perfectly able to walk, I'll be shot if some of them didn't try to carry him. The fellow looked a bit bewildered, and no wonder; but the mate and the doctor butted in and took him below. Then I looked down at the boat alongside and wondered what I was going to do about her. She wasn't an ordinary ship's lifeboat at all, but about the same size, only decked in, with a little cock-pit aft, and yawl rigged. She wasn't in bad shape, considering; but I didn't see just how we could save her. It would have taken a long time to rig a cargo boom and get her

on deck, and even at that I doubt if we could have managed it. Well, there I was, and you know how it is when you're carrying mails. You can stop to save life—and that's all.

So, having lost more time already than I cared about, there was nothing for it but to order the quartermaster to jump on the ladder and shove off. As soon as she was clear, I rang the engines full ahead, got the ship back on her course, and was going down the bridge ladder to have a look at our shipwrecked mariner, when, bless me, if I didn't hear another rumpus break out on deck. They say joy doesn't kill, but the shock of being saved seemed to have turned our man into a fighting lunatic. For there he was, waving his arms and howling, "My boat! My boat! Stop her, Captain, stop her!"

I thought at first he was rattled because I hadn't taken the bally thing in tow or something, and I started to tell him why it couldn't be done. I thought it best to pretend to reason quietly with the man in the state he was in. But the poor blighter seemed crazy, right enough, for, in the middle of it, he suddenly threw up his arms, cursed in a way even I haven't often heard, and then made one dash for the side. The mate and one of the hands grabbed him when he was half-way over the rail, and then he put up such a scrap that he nearly managed to get all the way over. The bo'sun arrived just then, and he was a good man who generally did the right thing at the right time. He hauled off and landed the maniac a clout under the chin that knocked him clean out and made him quiet and easy to handle.

I was telling the mate to put a lashing or two on the poor beggar while we had the chance, when the old Doc advised us to take him below and then *he'd* give him

something to put him to sleep for the night, and when he woke up in the morning he judged he'd feel better. So they carried him to a spare cabin and the Doc squirted in things with a hypodermic that certainly did the trick, for when I looked in later he was sleeping like a dead man.

That doctor was a queer bird. A bit prim and fussy, but a good enough old stick in his way. He said it was a most extraordinary thing the way our friend had suddenly blown up, as it were. He said that as soon as the lad got on deck he had taken him off to his cabin. Knowing it was dangerous to let a man, who maybe might be nearly dying of thirst, have too much to drink for a start, he gave him a glass of water. But instead of swallowing it down in one gulp as the Doc expected him to, he says, "Say, how about a little whisky with some ice in it?" And just then the telegraph rang and the engines started. When he heard that he looked surprised, the Doc said. Then he started up and stood by the cabin door, listening, and suddenly dashed off down the alleyway.

"By the time I got on deck," said the Doc, "there he was, striving to fling himself overboard."

"Well, that's that," I said. "He's nice and quiet now, anyhow," and I told them to call me when he came round, for I wanted to know what ship it was he'd come out of, and how she'd been lost, and what chance there might be of picking up some more of her crowd.

Next morning along comes the Doc to say his patient's all alive and kicking. And when I got down to him, sure enough he was. Especially kicking! He was looking pretty wild, but I held out my hand and asked him how he was feeling. He wouldn't shake, though, and there was a nasty look in his eye I didn't like much.

"Look here," says he, "I want to know just what you and your blasted crowd think you are playing at. You knock me about and shanghai me and——"

"Now you just calm yourself," says I. "You're a bit shaky yet, after the time you've had, and I don't wonder. But I must say you might begin to show just a little gratitude, maybe, to a man who's taken some trouble to pick you up out of a nasty mess."

"Gratitude!" he says. "Gratitude! Either I'm mad or you are. What in the name of blazes have I got to be grateful about—especially to you? I was running short of water and I signal you and ask you to let me have some; and then, the next thing I know is, you cut my boat adrift and steam off and then knock me on the head and God knows what. You're mad—you must be! But you can take it from me, mad or not, when I get ashore again I'll make you sit up and wonder what's happened to you or my name's not Winton."

"Well," I said, "I'm sorry you're not quite all right just yet; but you'll be fine and dandy again in a day or so when you've settled down and understand that you're all safe and nothing to worry about any more. I've been cast adrift in a boat myself and I know how it is. We'll do all we can for you, and if there's anything you want, just say so and I'll see you get it. I'm sorry we gave you that bump on the head; but we had to do it; you seemed dead set on drowning yourself."

"*Drown* myself?" says he. "What are you babbling about? My trying to get back to the boat seems to be worrying you. You wouldn't stop, so the best way of getting aboard again was to make a swim for it while she was close to."

And when I asked him what on earth he wanted to get

back on the boat for, what do you think he lets out on me? I thought he was mad, all right, at first; but it wasn't so long before I could have got up and kicked myself! He says he'd started from 'Frisco in that little thing—his yacht, he called it!—to sail around, all by himself, through the South Sea Islands. He mentioned some guys like Slocum and Voss whom I hadn't heard of *then*. I wish I had, for I might have seen a light a bit earlier in the proceedings. He'd been out three weeks and doing fine, so he said, and then some of his water went bad on him. That didn't worry him much, apparently, for he had about enough to carry him through with care; but when he sighted us he thought it a good chance to fill up and make sure. As soon as he got aboard us, he says, he went down with the Doc—to have a nice cold whisky and soda, as he thought. The doctor had told him to come along and he'd give him a drink, so, when he was handed that glass of water, he judged he'd struck a dry ship. But when he heard the engines start up and he got on deck to see his yacht cast adrift, and us steaming off full speed, he was absolutely flabbergasted. He yelled to me to stop the ship, but finding all I would do was to say, "There, there, my lad. We can't stop the ship. You calm down and we'll give you a nice drink," and tripe like that, he naturally concluded I must be drunk or mad. And he made up his mind to dive over and swim for the boat, which was still pretty close aboard. And then, he says, people began to knock him about, and the next thing he knew he woke up in a strange bunk with a pain in the back of his neck and a mouth on him like a main sewer.

When the inner meaning of all he said trickled through to my poor brain, you can believe me, I felt worried. And scared, too; for with the new light he had let on to the

business, I could see just how it was I had gone wrong all along the line and landed myself into the damnedest stupidest mess I'd ever been in. I explained my side of the thing, of course, and how it was natural I had taken him for a castaway and rescued him according; and how everything he'd said about wanting water and all had worked in nicely with what I thought. And I asked him how he expected me to guess that any man would be such a damned ass as to go sailing around out there, all by himself in a bit of a boat, for fun?

"Yes," says he, "you talk pretty big about asses. After the exhibition you've made of yourself, I think you probably ought to be an authority on the breed. But it seems to me the only thing you can do now to clean up your mess is to turn back and pick up my boat and I'll get aboard and carry on with the job."

By that time the yacht was some two hundred miles astern of us, and it would have meant another two days lost, at least, if I turned back, even supposing we found her first go off, which was unlikely. So I couldn't do that, of course, and said so; and when Winton saw I meant it, you can bet he was mad. He had lots to say, and he said it. All of it; and one of the things he called me was a fat-headed, half-baked, piratical old jackass. And I haven't forgotten that, because, when you come to think of it, it's just about what I was.

Well, things calmed down after a bit, as they usually do, and it wasn't so long before Winton was laughing at what he called the joke of the thing. But it didn't tickle me much, for it turned out that the boat cost Winton five thousand dollars, and the things he let fall about lawyers, damages, assault, and battery on the high seas, kidnapping under false pretenses and I don't know what

all, started me off in a cold sweat. It didn't do me any good either, thinking how the whole thing had happened as natural as eating your dinner, for it was clear to me I was right up to my neck in the soup.

Before we got in I offered Winton what dollars I'd got saved, as a bit towards making up for his loss. But the man was all right, really, even if he did pull my leg till he'd nearly added a cubit to my stature. He said he wouldn't touch a cent of mine. His boat was insured against loss, he said, and it couldn't be denied that he'd certainly lost her; although when he did claim on the insurance company they turned him down. They said their policy did not cover him against the risk of running into damned fools in mid-ocean. So he came down on my owners for seven thousand dollars. And, what's more, he got it. And I got the sack.

I'm glad of it now, for I'm comfortable in this old box. There's no one to trouble you here, and no passengers, thanks be! But I tell you what, the next lot of castaways I come across will have to sign an affidavit, *and get it certified by a notary,* before they get rescued by me.

# IX

## SPARRING PARTNERS

No, my lad, I'm sorry, but I can't take you. You seem a decent sort of a young feller, but the fact is I don't hold with passengers at all, and now I've got my own vessel, I won't have one aboard. No offense meant, of course, but passengers is just plain hell to a man like me who wants to take things easy and comfortable. Before I bought this schooner I worked for the French Company, and nearly every trip out of Papeete they'd load me up with passengers till life wasn't worth living. If they'd only take things as they find 'em I wouldn't mind. But passengers have just naturally got to grouse, and if it ain't the grub they don't like, then it's the cockroaches nibbling their feet, or their berths leak, or some foolishness like that. I won't stand for it any more.

I once shipped two missionary women for Manga Reva. Two, mind you, and I had 'em aboard for nearly a month! You know how it is. When you're on your own you can turn out of a morning and shake yourself, put on your cap, spit over the side, and there you are—dressed. But with those two old girls aboard it was—awful. After a week of 'em the things I couldn't do aboard my own ship would have surprised you. They did me. I couldn't smoke below, or drink on deck, or even swear at the hands. And you won't believe it, but the only place they'd let me wear my pyjamas was in my bunk—in a climate like this, too!

It was the limit all right, and I believe if I hadn't missed out half my regular calls in the end and run direct for Manga Reva, those women would have had me shaving myself every day, wearing stand-up collars at all meals, and parting my hair in the middle. Why, before we got to the end of that trip it was *them* who were running the ship, not me.

That voyage was a terror all right, and ought to have cured me of passengers for good and all, you'd think, but, like a fool, the very next trip I shipped a couple of gents who *did* take charge of the ship. You've never met Misters Body and King I suppose? Or heard of 'em? Well, you're lucky. They were the hardest couple of cases I've ever bumped into; but to look at them first go off you wouldn't think it—which was what fooled me.

At the time I was skipper of one of Lazards' schooners, the *Jolie Brise,* and we were lying here in Papeete, all squared up for getting to sea at daylight and I was just thinking of turning in, when those two birds came aboard. They were mighty polite and sorry to trouble me at that time of night, and so on, but they'd heard I was sailing in the morning and they didn't want to miss the chance of a trip through the islands like they'd heard I was going to make. According to Body, he was an artist, and I'll say he might have been one, for he looked as if he never had done a day's work in his life and the skin on him was as white as a fish's belly, and he needed a hair-cut bad. King said he wrote books, and I believed him—and even now I think he probably could, for he lied, quick and natural, as free as any story I've ever read. He was a great, big, red-faced, ginger-haired, cheerful looking beggar, and, I'll admit, I took to him at the start; so, what with that and the ten francs a day they agreed to pay me—well, I went back on

my principles and agreed to take 'em. You see, I thought they'd be company, for Lazards' run their boats with Kanaka crews, which is lonely for the skipper. Anyhow, they'd brought their dunnage on the chance I'd take' em along, so it was fixed, and to clinch the thing we had a few drinks and then turned in.

We sailed next morning at daylight, but Body and King didn't show up on deck till we were well clear of the land. That ought to have opened my eyes, you'd think, for from what I knew of artists and such they're always busy asking fool questions and getting in the light when you're making or leaving an anchorage and haven't got time to bother with 'em. My passengers turned out for breakfast though, and from then on they kept me busy explaining all manner of things they wanted to know—and not the usual run of questions either. We were making our ordinary run round the islands, dumping trade and supplies at the company's stations and loading what produce the traders had on hand—copra and shell mostly, with a parcel of pearls from Faaite generally, and maybe from Makemo, too. I'd done the same old trip three times a year for the last four years and was getting pretty well sick of it. You'd think it was easy enough to sail an old schooner around these groups, but don't you believe it—it's tough. The land's so low you never see anything till you're on top of it, the currents run all ways at once, and the charts don't help much, for most of the islands are miles out of position. Well, I told them all about this but they didn't seem much interested, and what they wanted to know was about the traders, how many there were at a station and what they paid their labor in, and things like that, which surprised me.

It was King who did most of the talking, and that Body

he never said much—just sat there looking like an unhealthy corpse, listening and taking it all in. I hadn't tumbled to anything out of the way about those two then, you understand, and it wasn't because I expected any trouble from them, but just plain common sense that kept me from talking about the pearls I was due to get at Faaite. King seemed mighty curious about pearls, too. He spoiled my sleep in the afternoon talking about them, till I told him there was hardly a pearl left in the lagoons nowadays owing to the fishing being overdone and the sharks eating the divers and stuff like that, till he went away, looking serious, to talk to Body about it and I got a bit of rest.

The next day King starts in about pearls again. "Do you mean to tell us, Skipper, that the pearling business is bust?" he says. "Yes," says I, "I do, and it is. And for goodness' sake, King, talk about something else for a change or keep quiet, for I'm sick of hearing of pearls. To hear you talk it's enough to make me think that pearls is all you two came aboard for." Now, as soon as I said that I got a start, for Body, who'd looked half dead till then, seemed to come to life suddenly, if you understand me, especially his eyes, which were black, with a lot too much white showing round the edges. He gave King a look that stopped his talk quick, and then he stared at me. I mean he looked me straight in the eyes, and he kept on looking, and there was something about him that made me think of snakes. He looked so damned ugly I'll admit I was scared. Then he says, sort of quiet and deadly, "Captain," he says, "I don't know what you think we are after, and to tell you the truth I don't much care; but you'll be safe if you say that King and I are looking for—well, yes, a pearl if you like. A pearl of great price," he says, "the pearl of wisdom, Captain. Wisdom! Think it over." And with that he sinks

back on the settee, shuts his eyes and looks more like a corpse than ever. Well, that's all Body said, and you mayn't think it much, but all the same I was frightened. I couldn't make out what he meant, of course, but there was a threat in it; and a nasty threat, too. I could tell that from his eyes. Then King bursts out laughing. "A pearl of great price," he shouts. "Yes. That's what we're after. Body always was the boy for wisdom. Think it over, Skipper," he says. "Think it over." And then he took hold of me with his great hairy hand and let me feel the strength of it. "And," he goes on, "while you're thinking, chew on this, too. A wise man minds his own business. If he don't," he says, "he gets hurt. Savvy?" Then he gave me a little shake, and such was the strength of the great beast I felt like a kid in his hands.

Well, after that I left those two sitting there in the cabin and went up on deck to think it over. And the more I thought the less I liked it. There was nothing I could lay hold of for certain, except that my passengers weren't what they'd made themselves out to be in the first place. I could see that King, behind all his easy ways, was as tough as they make 'em, and as for Body, the man was bad right through, and dangerous. If it came to a scrap they'd be too much for me, for I'm not what you might call a fighting man. I'm too old for it, and anyway they were two to one. I couldn't count on my crew for they'd be useless if a row started, so it was clear I'd have to try and get rid of the two brutes somehow; but how to do it was the trouble. We were due to make Maitea next day, but it wasn't likely they'd go ashore there of their own accord, for I'd told them myself what a hole of a place Maitea was, and how the schooners only called there two or three times a year. The worst of it was if they wouldn't go willing I didn't

see how I could make 'em. I couldn't count on any help from old Lewis for he'd be drunk and stay drunk, if I knew him, as long as we lay at Maitea. Anyway, drunk or sober, he never was much use, and, bar him, there wasn't another white man on the island.

And I couldn't see I'd be much better off either at any of the other islands I'd got to call at, for as usual my trip took in the small outlying stations only and I never went near the big lagoons. I remember, too, that King took a note of the places I'd said we were calling at, and I felt pretty sure he'd get suspicious and start trouble if I suddenly changed my plans and tried to put in somewhere where I'd stand a chance of getting some help. I'd have looked pretty, anyhow, telling the boys ashore I'd a couple of passengers I was scared of—and didn't know why! No, I was in a nasty mess all right, and there wasn't anything I could do except keep my weather eye lifting, and watch out for something to turn up before we got to Faaite and took in the pearls.

At supper that night I began to see a bit clearer which way the wind was going to blow because, when I asked for the advance of passage money they'd promised me—well, Body just laughed that sneery laugh of his, and King broke out a box of cigars from my private locker and stuck one in his face. "Try one of these, Skipper," he says, "and don't talk like a silly old Jew or I'll get mad with you." Well, that was plain enough and I knew then where I stood; and afterwards I wasn't surprised when I found my gun was gone from the drawer where I always kept it.

Next day old Lewis climbed up over our rail as soon as we brought up off Maitea, but do what I could I'd never a chance to get in a quiet word with him at all. Body looked after that and stuck close to me, and wherever I

went he went too. King took care of Lewis, and it wasn't long before he'd found out what old Jim's trouble was, and he soon had him filled up as full as a goat on my good gin. Then King took him ashore and had a smell around the station to see what was doing, no doubt, for when he came off again I heard him tell Body there wasn't a thing there worth laying a hand on.

There was only a few odd tons of copra to load and we got that aboard before dark and sailed for Tahanea. It's a passage you can usually make in three or four days; but that trip, as luck would have it, the Trades broke off, and what wind we got for the next week was light and mostly ahead. So the currents took us, and we drifted around, not getting anywhere much—and it was hot. It's warm around these parts most all the time, of course, but when the Trades die out then the heat at sea is enough to fry you, and in a schooner where there's nowhere to go and get cool and the drinks get hot—well, a few days of it works on your nerves, till you fly off the handle at nothing. For the first two days King kept himself in hand more or less, and all he did was to drink and curse the weather. But after a bit he seemed to think I was to blame for the heat and there being no wind, and then he started in on me.

By this time King and Body were drinking hard, and they weren't so careful as when we started out about what they'd say, or else they didn't care; so, bit by bit, the things they let drop made it clear to me that I'd got a couple of as tough devils aboard as you'd be able to find anywhere. They'd been up to some dirty game or other ashore the very night they boarded me, and I heard them laugh at the easy way they'd fooled me into giving 'em a passage. That corpse of a Body never said much, but when he did it meant something. "I was waiting to slit the silly old fool's

throat," he says, "if he *had* cut up rough"; and I knew from the way he said that he was sorry I hadn't given him the chance.

While that calm held, with the heat and the drink and all, the things that those two said and did got worse and worse, till at last they let go all holds and started right in to run the ship—and me as well. They were a couple of dirty, bullying swine, each in his different way, and the things they began to do to me make me mad even now to think of. King turned me out of my berth at last and took it himself, as he said it was cooler there, and when I made a show of hauling off at him, like a fool, he just let himself go and waded in and knocked me about the cabin till he'd pretty well wrecked it—and me too. When I came to I had a face on me like a bit of raw beef, and Body was pouring gin on it—straight from the bottle—the swine. They let me crawl up on deck at last, and when I got there I found the wheel deserted and all my Kanakas stowed away down forward and scared stiff. They cleaned me up a bit and seemed mighty sorry for me, but I couldn't get one to go to the wheel till they'd made sure from the snoring that our passengers were asleep. It was plain from this I couldn't look to the hands for help, and it was just as well when I came to think of it, for those two swine had all the guns.

That scrap with King was the start of as bad a time as I've ever been through in my life. Those bullying beasts gave me such a dirty deal, my son, that I don't talk much about it, even now. But you can believe me I went through hell all right—with some *very* fancy trimmings. Between them they just about hazed the life out of me. They couldn't even leave me alone when I was sleeping, which I had to do on deck, for as often as not I'd be jolted awake

with a kick in the ribs and one of those sweeps cursing me for not getting the schooner along. I think they were mad as much as anything at being stuck out there at sea. They'd been forced to clear out from Papeete in a hurry, and they'd counted on sailing clear and then getting their hooks on to anything worth their while, either aboard me or ashore on some of the islands; and as soon as it dawned on 'em that about all they'd find anywhere was copra and shell —well, they felt they'd been fooled, and turned nasty.

By the end of that week I was just about desperate, and you bet I tried my damnedest to think of some way to do those two swine in and get shot of them, alive or dead, I wasn't particular. I even thought of poison. *Me,* mind you! And once I went near running the old *Jolie Brise* ashore and taking my chance; but when it came to the point I didn't do it. You see, I'd been sailing around in the old girl for four years then—and I found I was kind of fond of her.

And then, one day, when I was just about through, we got a breeze again, sou'east and steady; and with the coming of the wind I got an idea, for I suddenly thought of Katiu and remembered that Willy Allan was trader there. As I've said, our next call was Tahanea, two days off if the wind held; and Tahanea was just like Maitea, with nothing doing, bar copra, and no chance there of help. And after that we made Faaite where the pearls were waiting for me, and I knew if we once got *them* aboard hell would break loose and the Lord knows what else would happen. But we ought to sight Katiu sometime tomorrow, and I thought if I could spin a good enough tale to Body and King, as likely as not I'd be able to load 'em on to Willy, and, with luck, get shot of the bleeders. I thought the thing out for a bit, and when I'd got it straight I made

up my mind to have a shot then and there. The wind had fetched my passengers up on deck, and seemed to have done them good as well as me, for they'd quit drinking and were sitting on the weather rail, glad to watch the schooner moving along again, I reckon, and cooling themselves off in the breeze. I was steering, and being desperate, as I've said, I started in on the business right away. "We'll be passing Katiu tomorrow," I says, "if this breeze holds. My company haven't a station there, so we aren't calling. The atoll's leased by a San Francisco firm, and it's the only lagoon in the Group where the pearling is worth anything. I've heard they do mighty well out of it, and there's black pearls there, too, they say."

Well, that line of talk started them off thinking, as I hoped it would, and they got interested, first go off, and started in asking questions. The main thing they wanted to know was how many white men there were in the place; and when I told them there'd never been more than one since I could remember, they asked me who was trader there then. So I told 'em most all I knew about Allan, and what a little, sawn-off, quiet sort of a chap he was; and when they heard that it seemed to please 'em. Then they wanted to know if I was sure about the pearls, and I said if they didn't believe me to look up the Sailing Directions. So King got the book and read out what it says about Katiu, specially the part on pearls. "Pearl shell and pearl oysters abound in this lagoon," he reads, "and black pearls are reported to have been found." Well, that did it. When they read that they looked at each other, and King laughed, and then they both went down below, to talk out the business; but I knew from that minute we'd be sailing into Katiu next morning and giving Willy a call.

By and by up comes King again, and he had a carving

fork in his hand. "We're going to call at Katiu tomorrow," says he, giving me a poke in the face with the fork, "and we'll have a look at those pearls you've been babbling about. If you get talking while we're ashore," he says, "I'll cut the tongue out of your dirty face, you ——." Well, never mind what he called me, but he made it plain that I'd have to watch my step next day and play up to the two of them till they'd got hold of the pearls, or I'd get done in —in a way that'd hurt. So I didn't feel so hopeful, after all, about my nice scheme for getting shot of 'em.

However, I'd got to go ahead with it then. Next day we made Katiu early, so when the sun got high enough I took the schooner through the eastern passage, right into the lagoon, and brought her up in front of Willy's station. We put a boat over at once, and Body and King made me row 'em ashore. Willy was there on the beach, sure enough, and when I saw that little bit of a man standing there, the only white man in the whole place, except me and the two wolves I was setting on to him—well, I felt mean, in spite of all, and wished I'd thought of some other way of getting myself out of the mess. For Willy Allan was as decent a little chap as you'll meet anywhere, and, though I'd only met him three or four times myself, I knew his reputation of course, and among the things I'd heard about him was he'd be willing to give his last cent to any one who might need it. It was well known you could count on him if you were in trouble to lend a willing hand. But all the same I felt ashamed of myself, for he was such a bit of a man—and I certainly was bringing him a whole load of trouble.

Well, there I was, in for it and no backing out possible, so I jumps ashore and says How-do to Willy and shakes hands. "I'm glad to see you, Skipper," he says. "I knew

you by your voice, and that's lucky, for you've changed your face," says he, looking round steady at the three of us, "or else you've had it changed for you. And why pull yourself ashore? . . . And who're your friends?" Body and King were sticking close to me, one on each side, so I makes out to Willy they're artists, going the round of the islands for the sake of their healths; and he looks at them then, kind of queer, but says nothing except he's glad to see 'em. Then we all walks up to the house and sits down while Willy goes off to get the drinks; but when he fetched them I noticed he'd put on a coat, and he shifts a chair next to me and settles down with his back against the wall. "Well, gentlemen," he says, looking at those two toughs on the other side of the table, "here's your good health, and I hope you find the trip is doing you good." King grins at this, but Body lifts his glass to Willy, most polite, and says it hadn't done them much good so far—but that they had hopes. And at this King busts out laughing. Well, if Willy is anything he's always polite, so, after looking at King a bit, he asks me how it was I came to make a call at Katiu, and I said I'd run in on the chance he might have a ton or so of copra to ship.

Now this was thin, for the 'Frisco firm run their own schooners to the islands they've leased, and, naturally, they don't allow their traders to ship any stuff by an outside boat. Now Willy knew I'd know all about this, of course, but what I'd said must have sounded reasonable enough to those two thugs of mine. Willy never made a sign, but I could see he was doing some hard thinking; and then Body starts to talk about pearls, very cunning and sly. He hoped Willy'd had luck with the diving that season and was it true that he'd get black pearls out of the lagoon, and such. And then Willy smiled. "Ah, I see you've been

reading the Sailing Directions," he says. "I wish they were right," says he, "but they ain't. They're wrong, and you ain't the first they've misled about them pearls, Mr. Body. There's never a pearl, much less a black one, that's come out of the lagoon since I've been here, and that's all of five years."

"That so?" says Body. "Well, I should have thought this lagoon fairly crawled with pearls, for it's just the kind of place I always thought pearls came from. Now, if you won't think me too curious, might I ask what those niggers out there think they are up to?" and he waved his hand out towards the lagoon, which was fairly speckled with canoes, from which, every now and again, you could see the boys diving. Willy smiles again, and, "Oh, them," says he, "they're diving for shell, of course. Pearl shell, it's true, but there's never a pearl inside 'em, worse luck."

"Now, to be frank, my friend, I find that hard to believe," says Body. "Very hard," he says, and then King butts in. "And me too, Mister," he growls. "In fact you're a nasty, lying, little hound," he says, "and you've got the season's catch stowed away somewhere and—to get down to business and no more playing about, it's what we called here for. So hand 'em over," and with that he pulls out his gun and bangs on the table with it.

At that I put up my hands and kept 'em up, to show where I stood, for I thought I knew what was coming, and I watched Willy. His hands were on the table, holding the edge of it, and his back was braced against the wall and he'd been bringing his feet in ready for action the moment King miscalled him, so by now he'd got them braced against the table legs. He looks at Body, not worrying much about King it appears, and "Gents," he says, "you've made a mistake about them pearls—and about me,

too." And with that he gives an almighty shove with his hands and feet, and that table humps itself and jumps on Body and King and tramples 'em. The edge of it took them right amidships as they sat and fetched a grunt out of 'em both that proved it had reached the spot—right between wind and water. They capsized backwards out of their chairs with legs and arms a-flying, and the next thing I knew, Willy was prancing round the heap with his eyes flashing and a gun in each hand—and he was shooting. Colt automatics he used, but he snapped off eight rounds and then changed hands so quick it sounded like a Maxim gun. Sixteen shots were fired so fast I couldn't count 'em, and I only knew he'd emptied his guns by seeing the magazines fly out on to the floor while Willy slapped the fresh ones in like a juggling trick. Then he began to let himself go—and I tell you that was shooting, for Willy never drew blood once, though Body and King were wriggling and squirming about all over the floor, trying to dodge, I reckon, or maybe the bullets were tickling 'em. I'd heard a lot, of course, about what Willy could do with a gun, and most of the yarns were so tall I hadn't believed them; but after watching Willy shoot most of the clothes off those two mutts and parting their hair for 'em, well, I'd believe anything. It was a sight.

Suddenly the battery ceases fire, and Willy pipes up in that squeaky voice he uses when he's angry. "Throw down yer guns, you skulking, hulking, ugly swine," he cries. "Throw down your guns. And now get up. Stand up and dance," he squeaks. "Dance, you nasty, greasy, knock-kneed, cow-faced beggars," he says. "Dance!" And dance they did, believe me. They had to. "Like the good old times," sings Willy, banging away at their feet; and "Ouch!" shouts King, hopping higher than ever and fa-

voring one foot, for Willy had missed for the first time during the performance and creased him on the leg.

Then, "Take hold," says Willy, handing me both guns. "Hold 'em," he says, "and mind yourself. They're hot." I held my breath and stood by to shoot—to kill, for Willy walks right up to those two great beasts and, naturally, I thought they'd do him right in immediate. I hadn't much faith in the David and Goliath business, especially as David only had his naked hands to work with. However, I needn't have worried, for it turns out that Willy can handle a dozen like Body and King without even breaking into a gentle sweat, for wrestling was another of his pet games, the Japanese brand, where the innocent victim does all the dirty work and helps to break his own neck. Jugee something or other they call it. Anyway, you can believe me, it works all right, for King, seeing Willy in reach without his gun, starts for him rejoicing, meaning to tear him up. But Willy tangles him up and ties him into a clove-hitch as easy and as fancy as you like, and then he ruins a good, new, tongued and grooved partition with him. He flung him right through it, and then he reached for Body. Body didn't want to wait for his little lot, but he got it just the same, and when Willy was through with his I saw that son of a gun of a corpse had got red blood in him after all, for a whole lot of it was leaking.

When Willy had calmed himself down a bit we scraped up the mangled remains of my two first-class passengers and propped 'em up against the wall; and then I explained how they'd got aboard me and why it was I'd had to bring them to Willy for treatment. Willy was back to his usual quiet self by this time, so he says he's glad I gave him a chance to lend me a hand in the trouble. And then that

man blushes and looks bashful, just like some young gal, when I thanked him and told him what I thought of him. That was Willy all through. As gentle as a woman most times, but surprising fierce when on the warpath.

Well, let that be a lesson to you, my son. It's only a mug who'll judge a man by his looks the first go off. You see how I took myself in about Body and King, and the thing works the other way round too—as proved by Willy. You can hear all manner of yarns about that man in Papeete. He'd been raised out West somewhere, and from birth he'd been a little bit of a runt of a chap with nothing to him at all—bar guts. It seems, being weak and small and shy, he'd gone through a hell of a time when young and got generally hammered and kicked and bullied all the while, till one day he made up his mind he'd got to do something about it—so he bought a gun. He couldn't hit anything with it at first, but he stuck to it and he practiced. He practiced and he practiced, and the point is, he went on practicing until he was sure he could hit what he shot at—every time. And then, when he *was* sure, he turned himself loose on the boys and—well, that was the end of the bullying days for Willy; for he showed them all he was sudden death, open day and night and always ready for business. The thing was such a success that Willy got interested, so he started in to see what else practicing every day would do for him. It got a regular hobby with him at last, and he practiced his muscles, they say, till he could scrap with his hands and his feet in a way that surprised a whole lot of people who thought him an easy mark on account of his size. The way he got to these islands was somebody made a mistake and shanghaied him and had to call in special at Tahiti to put him ashore. I heard they were glad to see him go, which is easy to understand, and

I'll bet that ship must have been the limit. It seems he took a liking to the Islands and he got on well with the French, so he settled down here—and I'm mighty glad he did.

What happened to Body and King? Well, you'll think it's queer maybe—but I don't rightly know. You see it wouldn't have done to let 'em go back aboard the schooner again, for they'd only have taken charge as soon as we got clear of Katiu. So I left them with Willy. He seemed very keen to keep them, and I was glad to let 'em go. I didn't catch on to what Willy was at, at the time; but next morning, as I was getting the schooner ready for sea, I observes Katiu's three white men come down to the shore and start in on their day's work. The two big ones were mighty busy clearing up the beach, and when they'd made a sort of sandy level ring, the little man, who'd been bossing the job, gets up and lends a hand. The next thing I know there's a real old free-for-all knock down and drag out scrap well under way, so I yells for my boat in a hurry. But just then I saw a light and burst out laughing, for it dawns on me why Willy's so keen on freezing on to my passengers. He'd seen they'd give him the chance of a lifetime to get ahead with the practicing he was so fond of, so he signed them on then and there as his sparring partners.

I never saw Body and King again after that, although I called in at Katiu again next trip on purpose to see 'em. They weren't there; and, what's more, Willy wouldn't do much talking. All he'd admit was that he certainly hadn't shipped them away. And so—as he'd never have killed 'em on purpose—I guess they just *wore out*.

# X

## A PRELUDE TO ENSLAVEMENT

"There is nothing more enticing, disenchanting, and enslaving than the life at sea."—JOSEPH CONRAD.

My friend Ledyer was an elderly and most estimable gentleman, and I was therefore sorry to find him looking, literally and figuratively, very blue. I said so.

"*You'd* look blue," said he, "if you had a heart like mine that didn't pump properly. I've just been up to Tokyo to see a specialist about it and my insomnia and dyspepsia and things, and he tells me I'm a dead man in a year or two unless I make a complete change in my way of living. Talked about fresh air, exercise, and a new interest in life! Why, you can't *get* fresh air in Japan, especially now every one's manuring the paddy-fields. Exercise only accelerates my confounded heart till I can't count the revolutions; and it's all very well to *talk* about new interests in life, but you don't find 'em at my age. So—you see. You're talking to a doomed man."

"Why not retire and go Home—and play a little gentle golf, or something?"

"Because running my business and making it pay is the only game I know and the only one I've got any use for. Also I'd far rather die interested than live bored to death."

"Humph! Fresh air and exercise, you say? *And* a new interest—— Have you ever tried yachting, Ledyer?"

be safely relied on to remain delicious and serene, and my old *Cygnet* (a 35-foot cutter, with plenty of beam and lots of freeboard) was as comfortable a craft for her size as the heart of man could desire. Considering these things, therefore, I do not think I can be blamed for getting under way at once, and for assuring Ledyer that he was due for the finest time he had ever had in his landlubberly life.

My tried and trusted hand, old Cho San, put up the side-lights as we ghosted out of Yokohama's harbor into the warm stillness of a very perfect night. It was clear and dark, but not too dark, because the stars came out in millions, lighting the calm waters and the unclouded sky. A gentle breeze on the quarter pushed us smoothly along and sent our sails to sleep. The ebb tide set us at three knots precisely where we wanted to go; and, to crown all, Ledyer remarked, "If it keeps like this, I do believe I shan't be sick! How do you tell in the dark where you're going to?"

This show of interest in our proceedings I recognized at once as a very healthy sign, and I set about stimulating the interest accordingly. I explained with care the workings of our compass, pointed out the gas-buoys and light-houses winking all around us, and then we streamed the log. In another half-hour my passenger had taken a lot of meticulous cross bearings on his own account, and soon he was enthralled with a new game, played with a chart, parallel rulers, and a pair of dividers on the cabin table. After this things commenced to hum. Our passenger fixed the ship's position in three different places at once, took a cast of the lead to confirm his findings, found things did not agree, swore it was my fault, and questioned the course we were steering. So I introduced him to the Sailing Directions, a Light List, and a little book on coastwise navigation, and left him engrossed in these great works.

At 10:45 P.M. he came up on deck, fixed the ship again, and announced that there was a lot more in yachting than I had told him about. "I tell you what," said he, "if you and Cho will pull the ropes and steer and things, I'd like to do the figure work or the navigating, or whatever it is you call it. It seems easy enough, and it certainly is interesting. Where do you keep your station pointer? *What!* You haven't got one! Why, the book says it is an instrument *no* careful navigator should be without. Besides, I wanted to play with it. I tell you what, J., I don't think much of you as a navigator at all. I'm not joking. I think you're too careless and slap-dash generally, and I'm beginning to think, if I don't look out, you'll go and wreck us or something."

"Go to it, then," said I; "I'm merely aiming to pass out of the entrance of Tokyo Bay without hitting the shore on each side or the islands in the middle. It seems to me I'll manage it all right by steering between those two white flashing lights on either bow and dodging that red light ahead of us. However, you get another fix, and give me the course and I'll steer it. Don't forget the set of the tide, though. And there's a little affair called a deviation card hanging up on the fore bulkhead which I strongly recommend to your notice."

Thereafter we navigated hectically till 11:30 P.M. At that hour our navigator exclaimed, "By Gum, I've clean forgotten to take my evening dose of medicine! And also I'm —well, I'm not hungry, you understand. Not at all. I haven't felt I wanted to eat since my innards went back on me years ago; but the doctors say I must take some easily assimilable nourishment every four hours, and it's— Lord! it's nine hours now since I had any food. Where did you say you'd put my black box?"

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"I forget," I said. "But shout down the fore hatch and wake up old Cho, and tell him to start getting dinner ready. We always dine at midnight aboard this ship when we're making a passage in the dark. It breaks the night up so nicely."

It seemed to me that, for an invalid who wasn't at all hungry, Ledyer took a lot of interest in Cho's cooking operations and mighty little in the whereabouts of his precious black box. It is true he did poke about down below for a minute or so; but as I had put that pestilential box on top of the ballast in the bilge, he did not find it. He was telling me how serious it would be if he did not take his medicine, when he got a whiff of Cho's cooking, and went off forward like a hound questing.

Old Cho was what you might call a deep-sea cook, and he was also mighty set in his notions; so, when Ledyer said something about "some thin dry toast and a little chicken broth," old Cho merely grunted. Cho cooked exclusively on an earthenware charcoal brazier, and with this queer utensil he habitually produced miracles, which I remember regretfully still. The miracles Cho produced that night were potatoes boiled in their jackets, and something which he called "beefusoo." Now, I am well aware there is nothing miraculous about a few boiled spuds and a beef stew; *but* Cho boiled his spuds in sea-water and heated them in a dry saucepan until they went all floury and burst. And Cho cut transparent shavings of mottled beef and fried them in butter in a thick copper pan. He added slices of leeks and various native vegetables, and stirred in sauces and soy and other mysteries until his fry turned gradually into something that would surely have tempted a dyspeptic angel down from Heaven, if only the smell of it had reached that far. And, while he was about it, Cho cooked

plenty. That night he cooked the whole panful—and Ledyer ate half of it. And when Ledyer had done he sat back and sighed. Said he, "I shall die tonight. In agony. But I don't care. *That* was food."

At 1:45 A. M. I poked my head down the companion, because our passenger seemed singularly quiet down there, and I wished to see if he were dead. And I saw that victim of chronic insomnia lying flat on his back on the lee settee. The cabin lamp was shining full in his face, and Cho was washing up clattering tin dishes in the fo'c'sle, but that meant nothing to one sunk 90 fathoms deep in solid peaceful slumber.

Old Cho and I took two-hour tricks that night till 8 A. M., when the sun, I suppose, or the sounds of breakfast getting ready, awoke our passenger at last. Still dazed with sleep, he murmured, "My tablets—from the small blue bottle." But a mug of coffee, hot, sweet, and strong, was the only medicine he drank that morning. And then, in a little while, he arose and yawned and stretched himself. He climbed up slowly to the deck, and stood there for a long time, gazing at the smiling day and breathing deep. And when he came down again his eyes shone and he was smiling. "I've slept!" said he. "I've been asleep for seven mortal hours! And I thought I'd never do *that* again until I was dead. I didn't take my sleeping-draft either. It's—a miracle!"

By 9 A. M. our passenger was learning to steer. At 9:15 I said, "You'll do. You've got the hang of it nicely. There's more trick to it when you're sailing by the wind, or running in a blow; but with this light and steady breeze you'll have a job to get into trouble. It's a lovely morning, and it looks like staying lovely—and I've been up all night. So I'll leave her to you. That gray thing in the sky ahead is the peak of Vries Island. It's fifteen miles away, and it's

where we're going to, so keep it dead on the end of the bowsprit. I'm going below to listen to the leak. If the wind changes, or you see any clouds making up, or a steamer or anything, you call me quick. Don't forget, *you're in charge,* so keep your eyes peeled."

I did not mean to go to sleep. I merely intended to leave Ledyer on deck alone for a while, in the hope that he might become infected with some of the joy there is in sailing a boat all on your own. I knew, too, if you want to get a man really interested in any job, there is nothing like leaving him in sole charge of it. That is the reason I lay down and shut my eyes. I could hear Cho already snoring gently, and the sound of the water rippling past the planking. . . .

At 1 P.M. the sun shining on my face awoke me. Cho was still snoring. The water was still rippling gently past outside, and I felt, from the general feel of things, that all was well. From where I lay I could see the face of our passenger as he sat on the wheel-box—and from what I saw there I knew he was now a passenger no longer. For no mere passenger could wear *that* look of rapture, awe, and sublime importance. No. Nor was it Ledyer, the hypochrondriacal worried man of business, who sat there so gravely steering the ship. I think myself, I was, maybe, watching another Columbus sailing on with hope and fear and wonder in his heart towards an unknown west; or, perhaps, some gallant admiral leading into action his mighty fleet; or maybe a small boy driving an express train. Something like that, I think. However, whoever it was, it did my heart good to look at him. Also it made me laugh aloud—for which I was sorry, because my laugh brought that enraptured dreamer back to this humdrum earth. "Ah!" said he. "So you're awake, are you? I'm sorry, be-

cause—well, I was having a good time. But perhaps it's just as well, because we're getting pretty close to that island—and isn't it nearly time we had something to eat?"

Vries Island is a queerish sort of place. It is merely the top of an old volcano sticking up out of the sea. Once upon a time, it seems, it blew out a bit of its crater wall—then the water rushed in through the gap and put the fires out. The result is a very snug land-locked harbor, where the lava used to bubble. A charming spot like that is bound, of course, to have its drawbacks, and Vries is a hard place to get into, because the winds get tangled up between the cliffs in the gap at the entrance to the harbor, where they blow all ways at once. And when you do manage to get inside it is no use at all letting go your anchor, as there is no bottom anywhere, so you have to tie up to the trees. However, the harder you have to fight for anything the better you feel when you get it, and we certainly had to fight to attain the peace and quietness of the perfect berth in which we lay that night. For the wind headed us and then failed us altogether in the narrow entrance, where the ten-foot ocean swells tried to bash us against the 1000-foot cliffs. We fought back with whatever weapons came handiest, Cho using a sixteen-foot sweep, I wielding the spinnaker boom, and Ledyer poking about with a boat-hook. Thus did we, sweating, attain the haven where we would be, bringing up, in time for tea, in the middle of a decorative clump of resin-scented pine trees.

That night, as I was turning in, Ledyer went up on deck, and stayed there for a long time, leaning on the boom. And when he came down again he delivered himself of something which I maintain, in spite of the sound of it, was an earnest and heartfelt prayer. "Rates of Exchange!" he whispered, *"and* stomach-pumps! May the good God

forgive me for all my wasted years." Then he turned in and slept like a babe till the day came.

Next morning the rain was coming down in strings, the sky was black, and the wind made nasty howling noises in our grove of pine trees. However, we had to go. Ledyer, in spite of his last night's prayer, still has a business to attend to, and I, moreover, was due to start Home on leave in two days' time, and it would never do if I missed my steamer. I warned my guest at breakfast that we were probably in for a rough passage, and he assured me he felt so good after two real sleeps that he did not care if it snowed. He then cut the top off his egg—and it was a bad one.

Before we made sail I suggested that Ledyer stay below and keep himself dry and comfortable. He said, however, that there were still traces of that egg in the atmosphere so he thought he would stand on the companion ladder and keep his head out in the fresh air. Cho and I then hoisted the mainsail, which emptied its bellyful of rain-water all over our passenger, drenching him to the skin.

Our departure from the harbor was the only good joke the gods played on us all that disastrous day. I mention the gods, because Cho assured me that the crater on Vries was well known to be a favorite haunt of theirs. And I believe him. They enjoyed themselves that morning, too. They sat on the cliffs all round us, dangling their legs and laughing (I could hear them), and throwing down nasty gusts and spiteful williwaws at us, till the poor old *Cygnet* got bewildered and quite lost her head. She took the bit between her teeth and charged full tilt at a cliff, got caught flat aback by a hard squall, and surged stern first across the harbor. Then she caught sight of the entrance and made a bolt for it, and as she reached it was brought up all

standing by a hard-flung williwaw which caught her right on the end of her nose. Then the gods laughed—and I think that burst of laughter blew us clean out of the water, because I am otherwise unable to account for the fact that in another moment we found ourselves half a mile out at sea.

Out there we felt the true wind—which would have been a comfort if there had not been quite so much of it. Also it was dead ahead, and the rain was pelting down harder than ever.

We tied up two reefs in the mainsail and shifted jibs.

You will note I have given that statement a paragraph to itself. It deserves it, because, while we were tying up those two reefs and shifting the jibs, some other things happened. The following is merely a partial list of some of the other things:—

1. We shipped a green sea down the fore-hatch while passing the No. 3 jib up it.
2. We stopped a flying jib-sheet block with our starboard ear.
3. We plunged one leg up to the hips through the cabin skylight.
4. We passed on two perfectly good breakfasts to the fishes.
5. We jammed one passenger's thumb in the companion slide.
6. We lost the end of the peak halyards.
7. We knocked the galley stove-pipe overboard.

However, as all good things must come to an end, we got those two reefs down in time—and proceeded.

Now I personally am of opinion that I like yachting. At any rate, I have been yachting for nearly thirty years, and

I propose to go on doing it. I will admit, however, that there have been occasions which convinced me that only congenital idiots go willingly to sea. And that sail back from Vries Island was most certainly one of the occasions. For one thing, it involved a fifteen-mile beat to windward against a two-reef breeze; and while I know it will be hard to convince some people that this means any great hardship, yet I feel the cognoscenti will sympathize and understand. *They* will understand that the fifteen-mile beat and the two-reef breeze were not the only factors involved in the business; but, for the benefit of those who have not been there, I will draw up a short list of some other ingredients which went to make up that prime little piece of hell:—

1. A boat with bows like a Dutchman, and a ratio of length to beam of 3 to 1.
2. An endless succession of high steep seas bashing that boat in the face.
3. Green seas over the weather bow ten times a minute.
4. Sheets of drenching spray over everything sixty times a minute.
5. Torrents of cold rain all the time.
6. Up! Woosh!! Bang!!! through every crest.
7. Down! Slosh!! Wallop!!! into every hollow.
8. Cabin wet as a waterlogged coffin—thanks to shattered skylight.
9. Cabin dark as a tomb—thanks to tarpaulin over skylight.
10. Cabin cold as a grave—thanks to lost stove-pipe.
11. Passenger, with heart disease, striving to heave his heart up into a bucket.

These things (and worse) we suffered (and more) for nine hours (by the clock, nine æons actually) until we worked in under the land, and found at last smooth water. It was by now as dark as the inside of a colicky cow's stomach. But I ask you, all the same, to try and picture the writer bending horror-struck, over the body of his friend, said body lying stretched out on the cabin floor, wrapped in a wet sail as in a winding-sheet.

Myself: "Ledyer! I say, Ledyer, old man! Ledyer!" (No answer. I seize my poor friend's hand and find it limp and cold.) Myself (in panic): "My God! *He's dead.*"

Corpse: "Dead be damned. I *can't* die. I *will,* though, if you don't get me ashore quick."

Much shaken, I jump on deck and head the yacht for the nearest port.

A brew of hot Bovril and brandy revived our passenger a lot; but the sound of the anchor chain rattling overboard was the tonic that really put him on his feet. We made no harbor stow of it that night, as you may guess, and I remember I made one tyer do for the mainsail, because of this reiterated lament: "Oh hurry! Please—*please* hurry! And take me out of this."

Ashore we found a silent village wrapped in darkness and in sleep. Sleep and the silence we abolished with rude shoutings, assisted by numberless outraged dogs, and the simple villagers (also apparently outraged) dispelled the darkness by switching on their electric lights. Then a large man, with a club and a gee-string, advanced upon us, seeking for our blood, until Ledyer, who speaks Japanese like a native, broke out into a torrent of that tongue. The large man checked himself to listen, and then he broke into a grin. "Ah, *so!*" said he. "You want to go Yokohama? Well,

I've got a one-ton Ford truck, and I'll take you there—for ten yen. Is it all right?"

We made it so.

I called at Ledyer's house next morning. I went in fear and trembling, prepared to hear that he was on his death-bed. I found him sitting up and eating a breakfast comprised, in part, of three poached eggs. "So *that's* what you call yachting, is it?" said he. *"That's* your idea of a pleasant week-end? *That's* what you want me to go in for instead of business! Yachting! *Yachting!* Of all the foul—— However, I mustn't get excited; it's bad for my heart. Which is a pity, because I want to tell you what I really think of yachting. I'll tell you this, though. You go and see a doctor. Go today. And ask him to examine your head. It's either that, or else you're suffering from too much fresh air and exercise. You ought to be shut up in some nice quiet home, and if I——" I fear I have forgotten the rest of Ledyer's remarks. In any case, about that time I left the patient's bedside—quietly but firmly—and went out.

Next day I boarded my steamer and went Home on a year's leave. Then, what with one little thing and another —such as the war, getting married, losing all my money, starting a new career, and so forth—I lost touch completely with Japan and all my old life there. I settled down in England. I bought a little boat.

Last year I was sailing my boat down Channel. It was blowing hard, with every prospect of more dirt coming, and I was carrying on because I desired extremely to get in out of it behind Plymouth breakwater before night. At sundown I had only a mile or two more to go, and I was glad of it. I saw a small cutter come out of the harbor and begin beating out to sea. "Must be a hard case," said I to myself, "to come out for a sail in this weather." The cutter

crossed my bows, and I put my helm up to pass astern of her. As we passed clear the man at her helm held up his hand to me in a sailorly greeting. And I nearly jibbed all standing. The other man was Ledyer.

Which seems to show that, when Conrad wrote the words which appear at the head of this story, he knew exactly what he was talking about.

## XI

## "SAILING DIRECTIONS"

THREE days ago the gods were kind. They revealed a Magic Book to me. They had hidden it on a top shelf in a nautical bookseller's shop. I saw up there a volume bound, apparently, in blood-orange peel. It was too high up for me to read its title; but the color of its binding drew me as with ropes, so I got a ladder and climbed. The name at once intrigued me: "Sailing Directions," it said, "Pacific Islands, Vol. III." The book apparently had no author, being "compiled from various sources," and published "By order of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty"; and when I read that I made sure, of course, the contents would prove to be exceedingly dry, in spite of the fruity cover.

The book commenced with something called an "Advertisement," which announced, quaintly: "The area embraced by this volume comprises . . ." And then I beheld a string of lovely and romantic names: "The Society Islands; The Taumotus or Dangerous Archipelago; The Marquesas; the Friendly Isles; the Ellice, Marshall, Gilbert, and Phœnix Groups; and the Scattered Islands near the Equator." Now, those are precisely the lands of my heart's desire!

I turned the pages, and this delicious piece of information was at once disclosed to my delighted eyes: "*Tematangi* or Bligh Island, ninety miles westward of Muroroa, was discovered by Bligh in 1792, and named by him

Lagoon Island. The natives seen by Beechy were armed with clubs and spears; some of them were removed to Tahiti in 1858, being strongly suspected of having eaten the shipwrecked crew of the *Sarah Anne;* those now inhabiting the lagoon are friendly. There is no pass into the lagoon; but, with easterly winds, landing is fairly easy."

After that I decided, of course, the book must immediately be mine; but before I could descend the ladder I had to read this: *"Pearl and Hermes Reef.* This atoll was discovered in 1822 by two whalers, the *Pearl* and *Hermes,* which were wrecked on it on the same night within ten miles of each other."

"No use arguing about that," said I to myself. "That reef was certainly 'discovered' "; and I managed to get down another rung or two before this held me; *"French Frigate Shoal* can only be safely visited between the months of May and December, and, except by a few Japanese schooners in search of shark fins, oil, and turtle-shell, is generally avoided. Several wrecks have occurred on the reef, of which the *Daniel Wood* and *South Seamen,* whalers, were lost in 1859 and their crews saved. The *Rebecca* also was lost through mistaking the rocky ridge on the main island for a frigate."

It is not fair to catch a man on top of a ladder with a book like that. However, I got down at last, gleaning *en route* the news that "on Washington Island the lagoon water is unwholesome, and it is stated that the natives have contracted Bright's disease from the use of it."

I bought the book, of course (its miraculous price was three shillings); and, when I settled down to read it, I found I was being transported, at last, to those pleasant and beguiling lands I had always longed to see. I think I have always hoped and dreamed that, some day, I might

escape from my gray and dreary rut and sail away to sunny, smiling places; but the years rolled by, with their worry and work—and their little tantalizing gleams of sunshine,—and they left me, dreaming still. For one needs money, or luck, or a ruthless determination, to lift one out of the dark and the dirt into the Pleasant Places; and all these things I lack. But—in spite of these deficiencies of character and fortune—thanks to the Magic Book, I *did* escape at last, and I had a very great adventure. I actually went on a voyage through the South Sea Isles. I positively sailed away to those pleasant, smiling Islands where I had always longed to be!

And, now, I hasten to tell you of this book and of the way I found, so that you, too, may sail along it—if you can. "*If* you can," I say; for you cannot *buy* a passage on the ships in which I sailed. But if you are given to dreaming, if you can let your imagination roam, if you can spend an hour or two before a chart or an atlas and lose yourself —and find yourself again wandering along some far-off shore; then (and then only) will you be able to master the sailing directions, and to follow the way which I have been traveling on.

If you are the right sort of person, blessed with an imagination (and three shillings), then I implore you to get the Magic Book. I see, from the title-page, that it *is* to be bought, and I am glad to give it a free advertisement here. The book *ought* to be advertised, and if the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty refuse to advertise it—then I must do what I can. Since I read the book I have been making inquiries and I cannot discover any one who has ever heard of it. I must, therefore, spread the light. The best way to do that is to quote from the book—at length and many times,—although I note these ominous words on

the title-page, "Crown Copyright Reserved." However, I will risk it; because deliberately to hide truth and beauty is to commit a crime against all humanity.

I find, hidden in the book under the bald heading, "General Remarks," a fascinating story of those bold seamen who first dared to sail across the vast and unknown waters of the Pacific. It seems that none other than Columbus led the van, "establishing his various posts and garrisons on the Isthmus of Darien." Then came Señors Vasco Nuñez de Balboa and Francisco Pizarro "marching across the isthmus with a small party," on the strength, apparently, of a mere native rumor. Nuñez, catching a glimpse of the new ocean, "took formal possession of it"—all of it, mark you! —"in the name of the King of Castile and Leon." Which is all very well; but it was that stout old Portuguese, Fernando de Magelhaens, who, seven years afterwards, was "the first to cross this ocean."

And then, it appears, for nearly two and a half centuries, no vessels sailed over that enormous waste, except a lost and lonely Spanish galleon or two. And what those Spaniards may have found they did not tell of; for when, at last, Lord Anson ventured round that way, California was to him an Island, and all the world to the north of that was—blank! But not for long; for there were men who looked at those maps of old, with their great blank spaces; men who dreamed, who wondered, and some—oh, lucky ones—who sailed away to see what might be hidden there. The book told me of these; a string of noble, ringing names to stir the blood of us unfortunates who have been left with only two blank spaces on the map, wherein, perhaps, some day *our* names may stand. Carteret sailed, and Drake, and Cook, who was eaten, and Byron, Wallis and Vancouver, Beechy and FitzRoy; "whilst of foreign offi-

cers, such distinguished men as Valdez, Krusenstern, La Perouse, D'Urville and Duperre."

Then the book goes on to tell of the lands that these men found. Tiny lands they were, the most of them, but very many. It defines that very lovely thing, an atoll, and also an "atollon," which, to me, at any rate, is something new. After this it tells you how to navigate among coral reefs. This seems a very fascinating business. You do it "by eye." You climb aloft and from your perch you . . . But you must read about that in the book; I cannot quote it all. You will be glad to learn, though, that the best conditions for this pleasant game are "with the sun high and behind you, and the sea ruffled by a pleasant breeze."

Would you like to know the color of a coral reef when seen through sixty feet of clear, blue shining water? Then I refer you to page 4—for I simply *must* tell you about Vigias. For a book which deals strictly with facts alone and in which every single statement is verified, confirmed and true, these Vigias are delicate and difficult affairs to handle. The book has a lot to say about Vigias, and says it well; but . . . Well, *I* think Vigias are mysterious and very, very queer, and I do not know quite what to make of them. One day, it seems, there they are, appearing as rocks, maybe, with the waves breaking over them, and your vessel may actually strike them and damage herself. But when you try to find them again they are gone—and there is nothing there at all but water, two or three miles deep!

At other times, it appears, Vigias materialize as islands "six miles long and three hundred feet high," which ships pass by "within six hundred yards." When a thing like this is seen and described, hills, valleys and all, by the crews of five different vessels, and then, suddenly, it vanishes and

three ships search for it and find "no indications of its existence"—well, *that* is a Vigia.

The Haymet Rocks are Vigias. The books says: "They were reported by J. E. Haymet, master and owner of the cutter *Will Watch,* when on a passage between Auckland and Rarotonga in 1863; the cutter passed between two rocks and struck on the northern of the two, damaging her false keel. The rocks are said to extend over a space of about a quarter of a mile, to have been distinctly seen, and with apparently seven or eight feet of water on them. These rocks were unsuccessfully searched for by H.M.S. *Satellite* in 1886, and again by the French Government vessel, *Fabert,* in 1887; the latter vessel spent three days in the search, under favorable conditions, with no result."

Dougherty Island is a Vigia. This substantial spirit from the vasty deep materialized before the eyes of the crew of the whaler *James Stewart,* which ship happened to be sailing just then through "one of the most desolate and isolated spots in the ocean." Captain Dougherty reported that he passed within six hundred yards of this strange ghost, which he estimated to be "five or six miles long north-east and south-west, with a high bluff at the northeastern end and low land at its south-western point. Between the ends there appeared to be a valley covered with ice and snow." This positive but unbelievable statement, that there was now land where hitherto no land had been, was later on confirmed by Captain Keates, of the *Louise,* of Bristol. He sighted, evidently, the same land; but as he described it as "a round island, of a dark color and eighty feet high" it was still possible to doubt the evidence that a ghostly island had appeared. Then came a Mr. Stannard in the *Cingalese,* who reported "having, in company with the ship

*City of Agra,* been close to the island for three days." He described it as being "six miles long and three hundred feet high at the bluff at its north-east end, and that there was no sign of snow or vegetation on it." He also stated that he saw the same island again later.

This settled the business. The island undoubtedly was there, and it was set down on the British Admiralty charts accordingly. And now listen to this: "Captain Greenstreet, of the s.s. *Rimutaka,* searched for this island in January, 1894, and saw no signs of its existence. The *Nimrod,* Captain J. K. Davis, in June, 1909, passed over the position of Dougherty Island without seeing any indications of its existence. In December, 1915, in clear weather, the magnetic survey vessel, *Carnegie,* passed within three miles of the assigned position of the island without sighting it, although a special look-out was kept from aloft."

There! That is how Vigias behave. What do you think of them? Personally, I think Vigias are wonderful and excitingly mysterious, and I am delighted to have found out about the things. The compilers of the Sailing Directions, however, hate Vigias. They deal with facts—hard facts, such as rocks—and this is well, for their work is to make known to all mariners the *exact* position of *every* rock, shoal, reef, or island, which exists in the Pacific Ocean. If the information they give is not exact and complete it is worse than useless, for it is then dangerous. Such airy, transient, yet perilous things as Vigias are, therefore, extremely distasteful to the compilers, who do their best to discredit them. They say: "A Vigia is a reported shoal, the existence of which is doubtful. In no part of the world are there so many dangerous coral reefs and low islets, rising abruptly from great depths, as in the Pacific Ocean! in addition, a vast number of Vigias have from time to time

been reported. Many of these have of late years been disproved by laborious research, but many are still on the charts, and until the existence of doubtful shoals has been disproved, they must remain a source of anxiety and perplexity to the navigator. A great number of these reports are from whaling ships, and it is a common saying among whaling captains, 'that they do not care where their ship is so long as there are plenty of whales in sight'; thus doubtful navigation and strong currents account for a large proportion of Vigias that encumber or have encumbered the charts of the Pacific Ocean. The appearance of Vigias, sometimes caused by reflections from the clouds, by volcanic disturbance, by shoals of fish, and by marine animalculæ, such as confervoid algæ, often resembles reefs and breakers so closely as to deceive the most experienced."

All this, of course, is very sensible; but, thank Heavens, it does nothing to shake my delighted belief that there is something mighty queer about Vigias. Shoals of fish and confervoid algæ may, sometimes, resemble reefs—*but* what about Dougherty Island, "six miles long and three hundred feet high"? Can that have been some *very* confervoid algæ? I doubt it. No—thank Heavens, again—I can still believe there is something most decidedly queer about Vigias.

And when I read on, about the islands themselves, the *real* islands, the little lands with natives and cocoanut palms, and traders living on them, it rejoices me to find that they, too, are almost as queer as the Vigias. For instance, consider Rahiroa and the Mormon temple; Rahiroa, whose lagoon "is so infested by sharks that agriculture has almost superseded pearl fishery as the industry of the island." I can understand those Rahiroans preferring to shin up palms for cocoanuts, rather than dive, naked and squirming, into the waters of *that* lagoon for pearls; but I

certainly do not know what to make of their Mormon temple. What can one make of a temple—and a Mormon one at that—perched in mid-ocean upon the shore of the vast lagoon "so infested by sharks"? The only conclusion I can arrive at is that the place is mad. Yes, Rahiroa is mad; it *is* a maniac island, for whoever heard of a sane island a hundred and twelve miles long by a few yards wide, with the highest alp upon it towering up a full eight feet above the blue and heaving ocean? Yet such is Rahiroa, where the Mormon temple is!

That the temple should be there at all is strange enough; but how it manages to stay there is stranger still. It is built, remember, on a mere ribbon of land, which sticks up only eight feet above the surface of a sea which behaves like this: "The hurricane of 1878 devastated this island, many of the inhabitants were washed into the lagoon by the surf and drowned; a few were saved by tying themselves to the trees"; and this: "In 1874 the population was estimated at fifteen hundred, but at present is only about seven hundred. This is, no doubt, owing to the hurricane of 1879, which destroyed every building in the island, including the Residency, with the single exception of the Church." It is a safe bet to hazard that only one brand of religion passed muster on the island after that miracle. One notes, too, a little further on, that the Resident was a wise man. "He is," says the book, "now stationed on Fakarava." I should not like to live on Rahiroa either.

But I should like to live on Vavitao, where "rosewood and sandalwood perfumes are made"; where there are "pigs, goats, fowls, turkeys and ducks, beside wild duck and snipe," and where "bananas, oranges and yams may be obtained." There, "the climate is mild and temperate, and the natives are a fine race, pleasant in face and merry

in disposition." I feel that Vavitao, as a place of residence, would suit me very well.

Rarotonga seems to have its points too: "It's climate is probably the healthiest and finest in the world," and "fevers are unknown." "Cocoanuts, limes, oranges, and pineapples abound, and coffee of good quality is grown." But I think I will settle on Vavitao, after all, for I learn, in two disturbing notes, that Rarotonga is afflicted with, of all things in the world, tidal waves and elephantiasis!

You have heard, of course, of Easter Island, covered with colossal statues of unknown origin, their faces "square, massive, and sternly disdainful, the aspect always upward"; but do you know the name those sculptors of old gave to their island? It was, says the book, "Te-pito-fenua," or "The Land in the Middle of the Sea." Remember that those first discoverers "came from the east in two canoes," and then look at the chart and you will agree that the name they gave their new home was as appropriate as it is beautiful.

Lost in mid-Pacific there is, I read, a little dot of land called "Sala y Gomez" Island, which has been seen perhaps a dozen times by the eyes of man. "It is scarcely more than a heap of stones, less than half a mile long and two cables wide. In a gale it would hardly be distinguishable amidst the spray." Something in this description of it daunts me and makes me think of Sala y Gomez as the most desolate and lonely spot in all the world. I imagine myself being wrecked and cast away on that "heap of stones, hardly distinguishable amidst the spray"—and I do not like the thought. I turn with relief to Nengonengo (or, if you like it better, Prince William Henry Isle); a spot, it seems to me, it might be profitable to visit; for "the lagoon is reported to abound in pearl shell and pearl oysters, in

which black pearls are found. Landing is fairly easy on the lee side of the atoll, but there are no inhabitants." Black pearls—and no inhabitants! I think perhaps I am unwise to spread this piece of information. Some one may now set sail for Nengonengo before I can get *my* expedition under way. However, I will be generous and tell you, if you go, "there is a good passage into the lagoon at the eastern end, and the anchorage is good on either side of the pass." So go, my friend, and good luck go with you—but, take a good, sharp knife down with you when you dive after those pearls, for the book says (and how nearly I forgot to tell you this important news!) that "tiger sharks abound in this vicinity." So look out, and do not blame me if you lose a leg or so.

The book's account of Crescent Island is interesting, describing as it does the strange formation and appearance of a typical atoll. "Timoe or Crescent Island was discovered by Captain Wilson of the ship *Duff,* in 1797. It is three and a half miles in length, and without inhabitants. It consists of a strip of coral about half a cable wide, about two feet above water, inclosing a lagoon into which there is no passage. Upon this strip of coral are several small islands (the highest being about six feet above the sea) covered with palms nearly twenty feet high. Landing appeared impossible on account of the heavy surf." Can you see that picture?

Well—thus my Magic Book runs on, its pages full of interest and wonder, weaving a spell around you as you read; till you see those lovely atolls shining in the sun, with the broad, blue, lazy ocean rollers stumbling on the reefs, and roaring up the beaches in white and creaming foam; till you see the stately palm trees bend their tall stems as the playful fingers of the trade-wind ruffle their feathery

heads; till you stand on the shore of a glittering, bright lagoon and hear the tinted waters lapping on the coral and the shells.

Read of Anaa, that fairy atoll, its fragile thread of reef, beaded with tiny islets, encircling, as with a dainty coral necklace, a shallow calm lagoon of oval shape. Think for a moment of the glittering, opalescent water within that delicate frame, shining in the sun like a burnished mirror set in the surface of the deep-blue sea. Then, try to visualize a shimmering reflection of that lovely picture glowing, phantom-like, above you in the sky. For this is the magic of Anaa: "It is said that curious effect, apparently of mirage, is produced in certain conditions of weather by this island. Its shallow lagoon projects on the clouds a beautifully clear greenish reflection of itself, which is seen at a great distance."

Such is Anaa, exquisite and strange—a fairyland indeed. The people of Anaa, too, you will be glad to learn, have in them something of the strangeness of their island. They constantly venture on far voyages in their own canoes; but "they do not care to serve for pay in schooners." I am glad they do not care to serve for pay in schooners. They are sailors; but, you see, they will not sail for pay; and I feel the reason is that they love their island and do not like to leave it for very long. Voyaging afar in their own canoes, they know they can return at will, to be guided, perhaps, by the image of their lovely home shining before them in the sky.

Strange facts such as that are scattered through the book, and they lend to it its magic quality. As one reads on one wonders if such things can really be; and then the book—maybe to reassure us that the facts it gives are earthly facts, not dreams—says, *"Caution:* It is reported that the

fish in this lagoon are poisonous"; or *"Supplies.* All sorts of cold storage meats are obtainable from the Tahiti Sugar and Commercial Company. Vegetables are scarce"; or, *"Communications.* The vessels of the German Company, *'Deutsche Handels-und-Plantagen-Gesellschaft Zum-Sud-See Inseln'* (locally abbreviated to 'L.H.' or 'Long-Handled' Company), trade to most of the islands in Melanesia." It is with that sort of thing that the book brings one back to earth again.

Then you turn a page and come to, for instance, Ducie Island. This little speck of land, lost in an enormous waste of sea, does not seem real at all. "It is an atoll of coral formation, one and three-quarter miles long. The lagoon is partly enclosed by trees, and partly by low coral flats scarcely above the water's edge. The height of the soil above the water is twelve feet, and the tops of the trees about twenty-six feet above the sea. No living things but birds were seen on the island, and great numbers of fish and sharks abound in the vicinity." Well, there it is, a minute delicate ring of land, a coral bracelet, rising about "twelve feet" above the surface of the sea; and I do not feel at all comfortable about it. A thing like that should lie upon the surface of some ornamental lake; instead, it stands alone, in mid-ocean, in water miles deep, square in the path of those mighty waves which roll unchecked towards it across three thousand miles of windy sea. I know those waves well, and I know if I sat on the top of a Ducie Island tree I should have to look *upwards* to see the breaking crests before they fell upon me. Yet there the atoll lies, inviolate. So I think the gods must love Ducie Island and protect it; for I know, too well, that those tremendous waves, towering above the little atoll, would break on it and blot it out—if they could.

The waves are balked of their prey at Ducie; but they find other victims. Listen to this: "The villages of Hikueru, Marokau, and Napuka, were swept completely away; in many islands all the small brushwood disappeared and nothing more was seen but vast fields of broken coral thrown up by the sea." And to this: "This island (Aura) was completely devastated by the severe hurricane of 1878, the houses destroyed, cocoanut plantations demolished, and vegetation generally so completely destroyed that for some years the atoll was not visible until close upon it, with the remarkable exception that several enormous blocks of coral, some of them thirty feet high, washed up by the sea during the hurricane, were, and remain, visible for about ten miles."

All these islands killed by the sea form part of the Dangerous Archipelago, that group of atolls scattered over a thousand miles of ocean, in the heart of the south-east trades. If you sail among them and trouble greets you, you must not blame the Sailing Directions, for they plainly hint that the Group deserves its name; and, further, they slyly suggest it is not worth a visit. "The Group," says the book, "consists of a mass of low coral islands. Navigation among them is dangerous on account of the uncertain set of the currents and the still imperfectly charted reefs and islands. However, there is but little inducement to visit these groups, as the only trade consists of cocoanuts and pearl shell." Thus the careful compilers; but, nevertheless, they are forced, some pages later, to this admission: "Copra and pearls are the principal articles of trade, and a large number of schooners and smaller vessels are constantly passing and repassing amongst the islands collecting the produce."

Copra and pearls! All the dangers of the deep cannot prevent that constant passing and repassing of the schoon-

ers if it be pearls and copra that they seek amid the Dangerous Isles; and the compilers (I grow to love those men) perceive this to be true, for they give their warning—and then fill fifty pages with particularized directions and advice, so that the schooners may pass and repass among the Dangerous Isles—in safety. These pages of the book are thick with notes, headed "Winds—Currents—Anchorages —Danger—Depths—Caution—Reefs," and the like. And a word of comfort, too, appears. "Shipwrecked persons," one reads, "need have no hesitation in landing at any place, as they will almost certainly be kindly treated and cared for."

Thus the Magic Book runs on, its pages full of interest and wonder; but I will not quote from it any more, because I want you to get it and read it yourself. But, if your spirit never craves to wander; if your interests are all wrapped up in, say, the current market price of lard, then do *not* buy the book. If you do you will not like it—or understand it. But if you are the Right Kind of Person, if you long to sail away to that dreamy sea where the South Sea Islands smile—then, my friend, get hold of the Magic Book by fair means or foul. Follow the Sailing Directions, and you will find that they lead you to the lands of your heart's desire.

## XII

## A GOLDEN CALF

I stood on the quaking edge of the saltings and looked at my boat where she lay, snugly bedded down in her mud-berth on the bank of the forgotten Essex creek which was her traditional winter quarters. Her name was *Nellie,* or "l'ill old Nellie," as the local fishermen say. And you must not imagine it was because *Nellie* boasted less than four tons of Thames measurement and more than sixty years of age that these epithets were applied to her. No. "Li'll" was, in truth, a most affectionate diminutive, and the "old" merely emphasized, I think, the duration of the fishermen's regard for the boat. My *Nellie* started life as a fishing-smack, and for fifty-five years she carried faithfully the men of our village over the pea-soup-hued face of those waters which are alleged to wash our shores, but which, in fact, deposit a fresh layer of mud upon them twice daily. When engaged on her lawful occasions the *Nellie* used to dredge for oysters, trawl for dabs and net shrimps and sprats. On other less lawful occasions she poached oysters from the Corporation beds, and smuggled part cargoes of Dutch cigars and French brandy up Pennyhole Fleet and similar secluded places. There is a legend in the village that a satisfactory conclusion was assured to whatever business *Nellie* became engaged in. She never in all her life was known to have starved an owner, drowned a hand, or got a crew into jail. Small wonder her men loved her.

For five years I had been *Nellie's* man, and I loved her, too. During that time she had carried me, with safety, comfort and dispatch, to such assorted destinations as Killeany in the Aran Isles, Urk in the Zuider Zee, and Muckle Flugga in the Shetlands. She had carried me safely back again, too, so I should have known quite well I could trust her; but all the same I remember standing on the edge of those saltings for a long while, wondering if my project of sailing her across of Bay of Biscay to Spain might not, perhaps, be rather too much to ask of such a very little old lady.

I have hesitated so far to call the *Nellie* a yacht, because I am anxious not to convey a false impression. She *was* a yacht, I suppose, seeing that I sailed her solely for my pleasure, and the passages we made together must in truth be designated "yachting trips," although I loathe the term. But it should be well understood that aboard *Nellie* there were no such things as spotless decks, shining paint-work, glittering brass, snowy sails, nickel-plated bathrooms, flunkies, or even a "lady's cabin." No. I am a very poor man, who loves sailing but abhors superfluous work, so the *Nellie's* deck was painted brown, her oaken sides were tarred, all metal-work was iron galvanized, her sails were tanned brick-red, the food came out of tins stowed in the bilges, there was a bucket to wash in, and I cooked and valeted for myself. And as it is necessary for the proper understanding of this tale that you should realize precisely the sort of person I am, I will state here that when making a long passage, I never wash, never shave, and never change my clothes, so that when I turn out of my bunk all I have to do is to put on my hat and there I am,—dressed.

But to leave myself standing on the trembling brink of this adventure for more than two paragraphs will not do.

Let me say, then, that after brooding over my boat for a long time and convincing myself that she was much too small and far too old to sail across the Bay of Biscay, I thereupon decided to cruise in her to Vigo, which seems to show that this adventure was ordained by the gods.

Fitting out a small boat for a long voyage is the most delicious occupation I know of; but I know also that a detailed account of the things I did to the *Nellie* while fitting her out would sorely bore the average landsman. Suffice it to say, therefore, that for three enraptured weeks I regaled myself with those works which most yachtsmen actually pay other men to do for them. I made my lady's toilet with all the care of a French maid. I scraped her sides with a steel scraper, smoothed down her skin with emery paper and pumice-stone, and made up her complexion with a lotion composed of one part shellac and three parts Stockholm tar, till she shone like a new-oiled Mulatto girl, and smelt of sun-warmed pine woods after rain. I cleaned out her bilges, painted her ballast with red oxide, polished the Oregon pine panels which embellished her interior, and brought out the lovely grain of that wood with massagings of aromatic turpentine. Then I greased down the mast, spent some charming hours making seven Matthew Walkers on tarred hemp rope, rove off new lanyards on the shrouds and forestay, set up the standing rigging, bent on the mainstail, filled the tank with fresh water, stowed in their appointed places spare sails, coils of rope, strings of onions, tins of oil, five hundredweight of coal, a bag of kindlings, a sack of potatoes, lamp glasses, a sea-anchor, rolls of charts, bedding, a half side of streaky bacon, 40 fathoms of galvanized iron chain, a barometer, a hand-ax, oilskins, six Dutch cheeses, one dozen assorted sail-needles with requisite palm, twine and beeswax in

ditty-bag, one ship and two patent logs, a tool-chest, several thousand small and handy items of assorted hardware such as staples, copper rivets, shackles, thimbles, screws, nuts and bolts, swivels, washers and nails of sorts, a tooth-brush, two hurricane lamps, an 18-foot oar, one complete set of Mr. Conrad's works, a boat-hook, sea-boots, a first-aid case, a coffee-pot, two compasses, a ham, three volumes of Admiralty Sailing Directions, a cookery book, two Light Lists, a bag of prunes, a pair of binoculars, three marlingspikes, four—— Gracious Heavens! Just look at that! My memories of a delightful time have run away with me in spite of all I said just now about not boring any one with details. However, it may comfort you to know that I checked myself before I had given more than the bare brief beginnings of a list of all the things I did and provided before *Nellie* and I set out on our cruise.

We set out one serene and windless morning with the first of the ebb tide, and drifted seawards in the sun and great contentment for six most peaceful hours. On either side low shores slid past us—four-foot cliffs, with a fringe of stiff sea-grass upon their foreheads and silken sheets of mud about their feet. And as I gazed at the flush of colors painted on the mud, I thanked the gods who had prompted man to name those shores so fittingly. I thanked the gods because man, left to himself, is far too prone to call a spade a spade, or mud mere mud, and had I been drifting past Mud Creek or Sludgy Bottom my day would have been quite spoiled for me. But names such as Goldhanger Creek, The Thirstlet, Tollesbury Fleet, Peaweet Island, Shinglehead Point, and Mersea Quarters are charming, so I sung them aloud to myself and drifted on my way rejoicing.

I thanked the gods, too, I remember, for the checkered buoys swaying stately in the tideway, for the color and

shape of the sails of some Thames barges, for the smell of seaweed stranded on drying flats, and the sight and sound of a flock of gulls hysterically fishing. Then the tide turned, and I let go an anchor in that dun-colored featureless desert of waters which is, nevertheless, known intimately to bargees and smacksmen as The Wallet. Here I cooked a feast of bacon and potatoes, eating these delicacies direct from the frying-pan, because I like my food hot, and regard the washing up of plates and dishes as a work of supererogation. This matter being accomplished, I sat in the cockpit and smoked, ruminating on the comfortable truth that, until the tide turned or the gods saw fit to send me some wind, there was nothing in all the wide world to do but remain most deliciously idle.

I woke to find the *Nellie's* bowsprit pointing reproachfully at a western sky all smoky gold and old rose. The day had died while I slept, and the tide had turned behind my back and cheated me out of a good two hours of strong spring ebb. I could hear the derisive waters chuckling and gurgling at me as they slid past *Nellie's* planking, and as I hove up the anchor I chuckled too, for it is not given to every man to make the very Spring Tide laugh. And as we drifted to the eastward in the Grip of the Current I chuckled again, because to use for your own small ends the Vast Forces of Nature is amusing, and eastwards (at a good three knots, too!) was precisely the direction in which I desired to go.

I stood on deck and watched the lid of night shut down on the horizon. Landwards, a garish glare of light denoted trippers, shrimps, cinemas, charabancs, and Clacton; to seaward, the faithful gas-buoys and light-ships began their night-long watch, sprinkling the dark with their winking eyes; while, aloft, pale stars appeared. I put up the side-

lights, lit the binnacle lamp, drew forth two kippered herrings from a locker and went below. Most people grill kippers, or even fry them. This is smelly, messy, and a mistake. The proper way to cook a kipper is to cover him with water in a frying-pan and bring him slowly and carefully to the boil. Then pour off the water, embalm lavishly with pepper and butter, and fry. When the fish begins to arch its back, assuming the characteristic attitude of a person afflicted with tetanus, then you will know it is cooked to a turn, and you eat it and regret, as I did, that while you were about it you did not cook half a dozen or more.

An easy way more or less to cleanse a greasy fry-pan is to waggle the thing about in the water overside. This method has many points to recommend it, not the least of them being that one can lie down to the work. It was while thus pleasantly dallying that I observed a little breeze running towards me across the face of the water out of the west. A fair wind on top of a fair tide is a gift which a wise mariner accepts with gratitude and alacrity. It is a combination of circumstances as enheartening to sailormen as a long down-grade and a free-wheel are to cyclists, and I made haste therefore to haul on halyards already stiff with dew, and hoist every sail that would catch and hold this gift bestowed upon me.

Followed a night full of entrancing hours; the peaceful glide through rippling waters, the threading of a devious way across thirty miles of dark and shoal-studded estuary, deep ponderings and slow head-scratchings over the chart, the cheering blink of gas-buoys, the apprehensive taking of short-cuts through unseen swatchways, thrilling moments of doubt, the sudden light on the darkness flashed from light-ships, the soporific swing of the compass card, the healing mug of hot coffee at midnight, the two slices of

bread and the large slice of ham, the still little wind that runs before dawn, the marvel of a new day breaking, the scent of hay blown off the land, the failing wind, the head tide, the tantalizing crawl towards that haven where one would be, the bloodshot eye, the tang of copper in the mouth, the culminating splash of the anchor, the thick-fingered stowing of the sails, the big yawn, the slow stretch and the long deep sleep well earned.

I slept, with a seaman's habitual little waking intervals, all through the day. Being sleepy and cosy it seemed folly to get up, especially as I could tell from my boat's behavior that the wind was blowing off the land. When anchored in The Downs, a wind off the land means a westerly wind blowing up-Channel, right in the teeth of little sailing ships bound out for Spain. Therefore I snuggled into my bunk and went to sleep again, and when at long last I bestirred myself the sun was rising over the Goodwins, and it was the morning of the second day. The west wind still persisted; but I, thanks be, am one of those patient persons who refuse most resolutely to wrestle with circumstance, and who are well content to sit and wait for circumstances to alter themselves. So I sat waiting patiently for the wind to change for one week. Do you suppose, however, that I was idle while I waited. By no means. Each morning I arose a little astern of the larks, lit my pipe, looked out at the weather, started the stove going, dowsed my riding light, cooked my breakfast, ate it, washed, aired my blankets, pumped out the bilges, swept the cabin floor, washed down the decks, made up my bunk, lit my pipe, looked out at the view, read Mr. Conrad or Mrs. Beeton, smoked, looked around at the shipping, brewed a quart of strong Formosan tea, and then (but only if the gods so willed it) I wrote and wrote, until the darkness warned me

it was time to put up my riding light again and my stomach called out aloud for food. At the end of a long day spent in such feverish activity it is wise to absorb into the system baked meats and strong drink in plenty, and I therefore baked and absorbed. Then I lit my pipe, looked out at the weather, tripped my anchor to see if it were foul, tidied up the deck, sat in the cockpit, smoked, looked round at the weather, thanked the gods that I was out of range of all evening papers, jazz bands, motor-horns, gramophones, telephone calls, and the benefits of civilization generally, and went to bed.

At 2 A.M. on the seventh day *Nellie* awoke me by rolling me out of my bunk, and I went on deck to discover an east wind blowing and a jobble of sea that was causing my usually staid old ship to dance with abandon in the tideway. Two o'clock in the morning is a wretched hour; but a cup of hot strong coffee taken internally can work wonders. Three cups and two rounds of toast so wrought upon me that I hoisted the mainsail, hove up twenty fathoms of chain and one 90-lb. anchor, set one jib and a stay-sail, steered *Nellie* round the South Foreland, past Dover and Dungeness, and then coaxed her to steer herself while I went below and cooked breakfast. This business achieved, I got out the chart and found the shortest road to sunny Spain was nearly 600 miles long, with a slight turn to the left at the Casquets and a sharp corner at Ushant. Now, 600 miles may seem a long way to go, especially if you have taken eight days to go sixty. At the same magnificent rate of progress I might hope to reach Spain in eighty days; but this possibility by no means daunted me—not because I am a dauntless sort of person, but I happen to know that, when easterly weather sets in in the Channel

during the early spring, it may with justifiable confidence be counted upon to persist for weeks. And with only one week of good fresh easterly wind I knew I should get to Vigo, always supposing, that is, that I had not in the meantime been stricken by death, accident, or an acute attack of lumbago.

From Beachy to Ushant is eighty-five leagues. It is a rough road, infested by bullying liners and hulking tramps, which run over and trample on little sailing-boats unless the little sailing-boats look out for themselves. It is a long road and featureless, with never a milestone, traffic policeman, or R.A.C. Guide upon it. You have to find your own way and endeavor to keep it, in spite of sly currents that lure you aside, in the face of bellicose winds which strive to head you off, and in defiance of the dark and the fogs that put out your eyes. On such a road the lone voyager has never an idle moment. The duties demanded of him by his boat and his stomach keep him intensively employed, and time flies by swiftly and unnoticed. Twenty full hours had thus flown when I observed a tiny lump upon the horizon and identified it, with the aid of a pair of binoculars, as one of the British Isles—identified it, in fact, as that particular British Isle known as Les Casquets. Whereupon my heart was uplifted within me, and I rejoiced exceedingly and was glad. And, in case you may think I am a Jingo to be thus excited by that glimpse of so minute a fragment of my native land, I had better confess here that my heart was stirred and I was glad because, since midnight, I had completely lost myself and passed accordingly some anxious hours wondering where the deuce *Nellie* and I could have got to. The sight of that island showed me where we were—right on our course, exactly where we

ought to be, and with this knowledge peace came again to my uneasy mind and a great desire for sleep flooded my body.

When the long mariner wishes to sleep in the middle of a long passage at sea he will be wise to heave-to. This is a technical operation akin to putting a knee-halter on a horse. When hove-to your boat may hobble about a little, but she cannot run away. Which is the reason I put my ship to sleep with her head beneath her wing, and fell asleep myself with a clear conscience. Every two hours my alarm clock woke me, and I looked out to make sure that all was well. And all being well, I would fall into my bunk again and sleep the tranquil sleep common to healthy babies, hibernating bears, and just men.

By seven o'clock in the evening I had slept my fill. I let draw the jib, and sailed on towards a shrimp-pink sunset and an apple-green French lugger with tan sails. I like the French, especially French seamen; and I like fish, especially when fresh caught. And Frenchmen, I notice, have nowadays a penchant for English tobacco. I bore down, therefore, on that apple-green lugger, threw a packet of cigarettes into the belly of her mainsail, made gesture and noises indicative of friendship and a desire for fish, received a broadside of Breton yells, much laughter, four red crayfish, a long eel, half a dozen whiting, and a 3-lb. sole, and proceeded on my way amidst rejoicings.

From the Casquets to Ushant is 45 leagues, a distance which *Nellie,* with a fresh fair breeze blowing over her stern, can accomplish with ease in one day. For twenty hours I steered her to the west; all night the shouting wind pursued her; all through the day a galloping herd of wild white horses trampled by; and when the night came round again it found me very weary, but with my spirit uplifted

by that unforgettable sail. Ahead of me I saw the Light on Ushant begin its battle with the dark. It is a noble Light and powerful, a fitting warden of the murderous place it guards, and all night long it stands there, stabbing and flashing at the darkness, faithfully guarding the ships. I was glad to see it. I had had a glorious sail, but twenty-four hours at the helm is my limit, and after a spell of that length I need a big meal and a long sleep. In the neighborhood of Ushant the traffic is thick, the tides are strong, and rocks and reefs are many. It is not a good place for the lonely mariner to go to sleep in, so I sailed *Nellie* into that quiet harbor known to the Bretons as Porsal, and there attained the two desires of my heart.

I sailed next morning at crack of dawn, because harbor dues are things I never do pay if I can possibly avoid it, and also I wished to catch a fair tide through the Channel du Four. This is a strange place, infested with passionate currents, bespattered with malignant reefs, and shrouded in stealthy mists. So I was glad when the savage tide spewed me out of the channel into the open sea.

From Ushant to Vigo is 150 leagues—for high-powered steamers, that is. For little sailing-boats the distance can be stretched out indefinitely at the wicked will of that god of the winds, Æolus, who is in reality no god at all, but a particularly malevolent old devil, who delights in playing dirty tricks on the bodies and souls of suffering sailormen. I know the old brute's habits, so I was not surprised when, after blowing me nicely right into the middle of the Bay of Biscay, he hurled at me a vicious gale out of the southwest. A lone man in a little boat out in the open sea is just the sort of victim the bullying god glories in. I had suffered many things at his hands already, and I judged I

was up to most of his tricks. This time, therefore, I was ready for him. The ominous and gloomy pall with which he smothers the light of heaven before commencing serious operations is intended, I fancy, to cow the mariner's spirit and make him an easier prey. The proper thing to do, of course, is to treat this melodramatic threat simply as a timely warning, make all snug aloft and below, and prepare your storm sails, oil-bags, and sea-anchor for action. Out of the darkness comes the rain, sousing down from the dank cloud curtains which Æolus draws portentously across the forefront of the advancing storm. He does this to awe and depress you, and the best way to counter this move is to lash tarpaulins over your hatches, light all the cabin lamps, stoke up the galley fire, and fortify yourself with a tumbler of hot rum and water. This puts you in prime condition to cope with the furious god, who can by now be heard outside, raving and roaring and foaming at the mouth. He has unleashed the wind! But, after all—what of it? Wind *qua* wind is merely so much sound and fury which, until the sea gets up, signifies nothing—nothing to be frightened of, at any rate, however tiny your boat may be, provided always she be well found, properly handled, and has plenty of sea-room. I speak thus contumeliously of gales only. Sometimes Æolus goes stark staring mad, when his paroxysms produce a hurricane—which is quite another story. But, even so, I have a friend who is smaller than me, and he has a boat which is smaller than my *Nellie*. And those two once had the dire misfortune to be in the way when Æolus had a fit, went berserk, and ran amok. And my friend and his boat passed through the very heart of the hurricane, and came out again at the other side—battered and astonished, it is true, but still alive, and quite undaunted. Knowledge of happenings

such as that induces a healthier circulation in faint hearts and cold feet, conduces to more sanguine complexions in white livers, and tones down the color scheme of the bluest of blue funks. So I thought of this thing, and was emboldened and went up on deck and faced the angry god, who did no more than pettishly snatch my hat from my head and peevishly spit in my face. Accordingly I laughed at him and put out my sea-anchor.

A sea-anchor is a jelly-bag-like affair of canvas, with its mouth kept open by a hoop of wood. You attach it, with a long strong line, to the bows of your boat, where it drags in the water, holding her head to the wind. I learnt this method of combating with Æolus in Japan, where they practice an art known as Jujitsu, which enables the small and weak to overcome the great and powerful by merely giving way at the proper instant. Little ships must not try to battle with the mighty waves of the sea. The waves are Æolus' storm-truppen, and when he launches them at you in a frontal attack they will surely overcome you if you are foolish enough to play their game and fix bayonets and charge them. So—face them. Face them always; but as each wave threatens to fall upon you and blot you out —*give way*. Give way a foot or two merely, and the wave falls at your feet, when, ignoring the rules of the Marquis of Queensberry, you trample on the prostrate carcass of your foe. If aided by a sea-anchor and otherwise left to herself, my *Nellie* could be confidently trusted to sustain an offensive-defensive of this nature for days on end, and I therefore left her in sole command of the operations and went to bed, which is the proper way to treat the wind god. Let him rage and rampage while you yourself take matters as easily and as comfortably as you can. The stupid old fellow has no staying power, and he must in time wear

himself out. So let him. He will tire and weaken, and then, as likely as not, a mere anti-cyclone will come along and shoulder the old braggart into the next hemisphere, when you can proceed on your way again in peace and quietness.

In due time, then, I resumed my voyage. I passed through the zone of the recent battle, where the face of the waters resembled the devastated areas of the Somme, except that each and every shell-hole and mine-crater was in most agitated motion. Beyond, I passed out into a gently rolling country, very pleasant withal. Here light airs fanned my ship along, and I caught a ten-pound bonito, and ate two pounds of him at one sitting. And I wish to commend thin steaks culled from the tail-end of a fresh-caught mid-Biscayan bonito. Fried in butter until a golden brown and eaten sizzling from the pan, this seraphic esculent might well tempt Monsieur Brillat-Savarin himself down from his niche in heaven.

The Bay of Biscay is a badly maligned piece of water. Crossing the Bay is commonly held to be so dire a business that I suppose I cannot hope to be believed when I say I spent a most delicious week drifting about all by myself in the middle of the place. Blessed by a spell of calm and serene weather, I attained, for seven whole days, a condition of perfect peace. The dawns came up, and found me floating on a smooth and cobalt sea. Sparkling mornings soaked me in sunshine. I was lulled in the lap of hazy placid afternoons. The evenings passed, soothing as the tranquil whisperings of peace, and the nights were full of sleep and silence.

On the eighth day came the fog. Out of the fog came a roar as from the brazen throat of the Bull of Bashan, and the sullen thudding of propeller blades was the sound of

his galloping hooves. I hammered on my bell (Oh! forlorn and impotent tinklings), and stiffened to the sound of a bow wave hissing at me like a thousand snakes. "Hard a-port!" bawled a startled voice. "*Hard* over!" And then a varnished bowsprit was thrust through the fog, transfixing *Nellie's* mainsail like a spear. Came a splitting *crack*, the deck beneath my feet buckled and splintered, and I jumped and clung with hands and feet to the other ship's bobstay. Above me I saw a shapely prow, shining black and polished like a patent leather shoe, while on each bow, written in letters of gold, gleamed the surprising words *Constellation*. A large man bent himself over the rail above me, dangling a rope. Said he, "Lay hold o' that, Jack. Slip yer leg through the bowline, Antonio. And hold fast. Holdo tighto, savvy? All right, boys; haul him aboard." Thus and no otherwise was I rescued from shipwreck, without even getting my feet wet.

I climbed over a broad teak rail on to a spotless deck that ran aft in a beautiful sweep for 150 feet and more. Three polished masts towered up from the immaculate stretch of planking and lost themselves aloft in the fog. Amidships gleamed a varnished deck-house resplendent with shining brass; and two mahogany launches, one white enameled gig, and a bright red speed-boat hung in davits along either rail. Snow-white cotton ropes were coiled on glittering brass belaying pins, white and creaseless canvas covers encased the vessel's sails, all halyards and sheets were Flemish-coiled, and I could feel the deck on which I stood vibrating—which things sufficed to make it clear to me that I was now an uninvited guest aboard an auxiliary schooner yacht of that disgusting variety described as "magnificent" by yacht-brokers and "palatial" by all hack journalists.

"Speakey vous English, signorino?" said the large man who had rescued me.

And "I do," I replied. "And I want to speak a few pregnant words of it now to the damned no-sailor who drives this floating beauty-parlor about the high seas at full speed in a thick fog with his filthy eyes shut."

"Gee!" said the large man. "And I took you for a Dago! The skipper's aft; but I guess it's our owner you want to say your little prayer to. *He's* the man who drives her. He's aft, too."

In the stern I came upon a row of backs draped over the taffrail. All hands seemed to be assembled there, presenting to me an array of rear elevations sheathed in ten blue dungaree pants, three blue serge trousers, and one chromatic specimen of those grotesque garments known as "plus-fours."

"About turn!" I cried, in my most parade-ground voice, for, though I was very angry, the situation tickled me. And at the word the inhabitants of those assorted trouserings whirled round as one man and gaped at me goggle-eyed. "If you were looking for me," said I, "you now see me. If you kept as bright a look-out over the bow as you seem to do over the stern you wouldn't have run me down. If you're looking for my boat you can give it up, because you cut her in two halves, bad cess to you, and she sank like a stone. And if you're looking for survivors you may now desist, because I'm the owner, captain, and crew combined of the boat you've just murdered, which is a crime I'm going to make you suffer for if I have to wade through blood to do it. Now, *who* is the congenital somnambulist in alleged command of this pestiferous peregrinating lazarhouse?"

"I am," said the occupant of the largest pair of blue

serge trousers. "I am. And if you think you can call *me*——" But here his utterance was cut off by the incumbent of the polychromatic plus-fours.

"That'll do, Cap'n," snapped this individual. "Start the engines ahead again and get the yacht on her course. That's your job. I'll handle this. You men get forward out of here, quick. And you, mister, you say you're the owner of the boat we've just sunk? Sit down, then. I own this boat, and my name's Van Eyke. You said just now you purposed making me suffer. Now, you tell me why—and *how*. But hold on a minute. Steward! STEWARD!! Bring coffee. Breakfast. And cigarettes, cigars. Make it snappy."

The *Constellation's* owner then bent forward in his chair and looked hard at me. And I looked hard at him. He was worth looking at. He was . . . But it will save me the trouble of describing that man if you think of a large and virile Woodrow Wilson, with the eyes and nose of a predatory eagle and a bald pink head. Fascinated by this extraordinary spectacle I remained quite dumb, sustaining as best I could the glare from those two piercing eyes; and I admit I was relieved when a steward crept up and insinuated between us a table on which were arrayed, amongst other things, a silver coffee-pot, a copper coffee-pot, an earthenware jug of cream, a silver jug of hot milk, a golden bowl of Demerara sugar, a silver bowl of lump sugar, three tablets of saccharine on a small black lacquer tray, a box of green figs, a box of purple figs, a basket of voluptuous hothouse peaches, a basket of noble pears, a mahogany casket full of assorted cigars, and a cut-glass decanter of brandy.

Mr. Van Eyke unfastened his gaze from my face and pushed his groaning board towards me. "Don't start in talking yet," said he. "Take the edge off your temper first

with some of this. I recommend the Vera Paz—the copper pot,—and put some brandy in it. It'll make a nice soothing syrup for you. I can quite understand you looking for blood. Any man would after having his boat sunk under him before breakfast. I'll keep you company with a little weak Java and saccharine. Have a pear, do. Or some peaches. I'll eat green figs myself. I find them a cracker-jack aperient. Well, if you *won't* eat you must smoke. The J. S. Murias in that box are still in prime condition. Take one, man! By the time you've smoked that you'll feel you love all your fellow-creatures, including me. And then we can discuss our little accident without you wanting to bite me."

"You can call it a little accident if you like," I said. "But *I* call it wicked murder. You've sunk my poor old boat and everything I own in her. You go blinding about full speed through a thick fog without caring a hoot what happens to any one else. People like you and your skipper ought to be abolished—painfully. And you will be, too—as soon as I get ashore. It's a clear case of reckless navigating, and I'll have your ship attached and your skipper's certificate canceled if I have to sell the shirt off my back to do it."

The *Constellation's* owner stared hard at me while I delivered my ultimatum. And I, being full of wrath and righteous indignation, glared back at him. Presently he sat back and sighed.

"Yes," said he then. "You look as if you mean what you say. And I think you'll try it. *Now!* I'd fight you through all the courts in Europe—and then some, if I felt that way. But I don't. It'd spoil my vacation. And it's the only holiday I've ever had in my life. So—I won't fight—just for once. I guess I'll square this thing. And, first of all,

you mustn't blame my skipper for going full speed. He wanted to slow down as soon as we hit this fog; and I said I'd fire him if he did, because you see I'm in a hurry to get to Arcachon. Result is, you lose your boat—through *my* fault. I admit it. Well, I'll pay for her. How much?"

I regarded this remarkable person with my mouth, I fear, wide open. "Do you mean——" I said, and then seeing quite well he *did* mean it, I went on. "I don't suppose for one moment *you'll* understand, but this isn't a question of the two hundred pounds my poor boat cost me. No mere money can pay me for the loss of——"

"Ah! I see," said Van Eyke. "I get you. You want two hundred pounds for the boat, plus something for alleged sentimental value. Well, I'll pay for that too. For the sake of peace and my holiday, and just this once, I'll pay anything in reason. What's it all come to?"

"Damn you!" I cried. "Can't you understand I loved my boat, and not all your filthy money can get her back for me."

And then Van Eyke surprised me. "Oh, my good Lord!" he cried, and he jumped to his feet and put both hands upon my shoulders. "I've made you lose—an old friend and—— Gee! And here I've been talking big about *paying* you for it. I guess right now I'm feeling kind of mean; but I hope you'll believe me when I say I'm almighty ashamed —and I understand—and I'm *darnation* sorry."

Now what can you do with a man like that? Personally in a little while I took his proffered hand and forgave him, drank three cups of his perfect coffee, ate two pears and three peaches, and before I had smoked half-way through one of his most magnificent cigars I had accepted his check for $1000 and agreed to call the late regrettable incident closed.

"Fine!" said Van Eyke. "That's the way to do business. Now, see here! I'm bound for Arcachon and Cowes, England. And if Cowes is any good to you, I'll be glad if you'll come with me. We'll get there inside ten days, because I've got to catch the New York mail-boat. My holiday's nearly done, and you'll do me a real favor if you'll help me to enjoy what's left of it. There's just me aboard here, all by myself, and if you'll come along I'll be more than glad of your company. I think you and me'll get on. We'll hit the high spots on all of France we can reach in the time and enjoy ourselves. I can feel it coming. My! Aren't I glad to have company."

"Thank you," I said. "I'll be thankful for a passage home. I must warn you, though, that I'm a poor man, and I'm used to living very quietly. I won't be able to go the pace you're probably accustomed to. And I've got nothing with me except what I stand up in."

"You should worry!" said Van Eyke. *"I'll* fix you, my friend."

He did.

The fixing included an apartment (I refuse to call that royal abode a cabin), the furnishings and fittings of which far outshone any mere stateroom-de-luxe that I have so far seen; and, as I am totally unused to luxury, I propose to give an inventory of the things inside that place which most impressed me. Thus: a carpet into which I sank up to my hocks; a double bedstead, with canopy complete; a camphor-wood wardrobe larger than *Nellie's* cabin, which lit lamps inside itself when I opened its doors, and discouraged dampness within its interior by means of an automatic electric stove; a telephone; an electric radiator with automatic heat regulator attached; two saddleback chairs (I repeat, two); eleven electric lights that shone effulgently

or glowed discreetly on demand; a threefold full-length mirror (my fortnight old beard showed up beautifully in that); a flock of soft silk cushions of divers colors and shapes; nine . . . But that is enough, I think, to make it clear that yachting as practiced aboard the *Nellie* and the *Constellation* were two very different things.

"You'll do all right here, I hope," said my host. "Your bathroom is through this door. If you'd like to have a bath now I'll see what I can find in the way of clothes and gear for you. And if there's anything the stewards can't get you, you 'phone for me."

That bathroom deserves a chapter to itself; but I will only mention here that it was all white tiles and silver-plated pipes and knick-knacks. Sunk in the floor was a species of small swimming bath, and when I turned a tap labeled "Hot-Salt" a two-inch stream of scalding water gushed out and filled that bath with astounding speed. I remember I was much impressed by that tap. There were no reluctant dribblings about it; but when you turned the thing on it functioned prodigiously, producing hot Niagaras. That bath had other taps too, which delivered on demand cold salt water, hot fresh water, and cold fresh water in the form of torrents, showers, and "needle-sprays." I tried them all; dried myself on a towel the size of *Nellie's* mainsail; abolished my beard with a large pair of scissors, a small pair of scissors, a shaving-brush the size of an immense chrysanthemum, two kinds of shaving cream, and a super-patent safety razor with automatic blade change; attired myself in a camel-hair blanket-cum-dressing-gown; and returned, refreshed, to the splendor of my cabin and looked about for my old sea-clothes. They had vanished, but I found hanging in the wardrobe six complete suits, plus evening clothes, and a fur overcoat. Further explora-

tions revealed copious supplies of silk underwear, collars, ties, handkerchiefs, and also footwear ranging from patent leather pumps to rubber sea-boots. On the dressing-table were laid out neatly a cigarette-case, a silver matchbox, a wrist watch, a patent cigar-lighter, a pocketbook, a fountain-pen, Van Eyke's $1000 check, and lastly, the pipe and tobacco-pouch which, except for my clothes and my life, were the only things I had managed to save from the wreck of the *Nellie*.

I clothed myself in superfine raiment and went on deck to find the fog gone, the sun shining, the *Constellation* lying motionless upon a glassy sea, and her owner climbing out of the engine-room companionway, wiping oil from his hands on a piece of cotton waste. "Ah, there you are!" said he. "Found everything you need? Our motor has broken down, and the engineers tell me it's a shore job to get it fixed up again. They're right, too. I've just been down to make sure. So here we are. Engine gone phut and no wind. And I want to get to Arcachon tomorrow morning. I've arranged to meet a man there. He's from Bordeaux, and knows more about wines and vintages than anybody alive, and I need his advice on stocking up my cellar."

"It looks as if your man would have to wait," I said. "There's no sign of wind in the sky, and we're a good two hundred miles from Arcachon."

"He won't wait," said Van Eyke. "But that doesn't matter. What riles me is I'd planned to *be* there, and I don't like having my plans go wrong. On shore they don't; but I find they do at sea sometimes. That's why I'm getting such a kick out of this sea-trip. The sea don't give a damn for me or my money, and I guess, maybe, that's good for me. I know I'm up against something I can't drive, lead,

bully, or bluff. *But,* I'd feel real pleased if I managed to get to Arcachon tomorrow, in spite of it. Hullo! What's that?"

He pointed to the far horizon, on which appeared a funnel and two masts of unequal length. "Trawler," I said. "Bound east. She's a Frenchman most likely, going home with her catch."

"Fine work," said Van Eyke. "We'll get her to give us a tow."

"Tow!" I cried. "Good Lord! If you're serious, which you seem to be, you can take it from me it can't be done. He'll never tow you. He's full of fish, with his market to catch. And, anyhow, how do you think you're going to ask him?"

"You watch!" said Van Eyke. "This is where I shine. I give the sea best, as I've said; but put me up against *homo sapiens,* and I back myself to win every time. Look how I've managed to get round you already, for instance."

With this significant utterance that extraordinary man turned his batteries upon his captain. "Skipper," said he, "I want to speak to that fish-boat. Signal him and say so."

"Signal her, sir?" said the astonished skipper. "Why, she's much too far off to read our flags, and——"

"Too far off nothing!" Van Eyke rapped out. "If we can see him, he can see us. Hoist all the flags you've got. Shoot off a rocket. Keep on shootin' 'em off. Blow the whistle. Get all hands on deck, and set 'em to waving things, and burning flares and blue lights. Make a smoke. Raise hell every way you know how. And then some. Hoist the biggest American ensign we've got up to the mast-head. That Frenchman'll smell dollars behind that, and come across here jumping. And in case all that doesn't work you'd better stand by to lower the speed-boat and

I'll run across to him and bring him here myself. What's the use of a will and a brain, man, if you don't use 'em? Now—*hustle!"*

That trawler, needless to say, came up at full speed. She arrived with a bone in her teeth, smoke spouting from her funnel, and her crew hanging over her rail, their mouths open, and their eyes bulging. They waved their arms and they shouted. They desired to learn what peril threatened us. And when they learned that we merely desired a tow, they, very naturally, got angry and pelted us with Basque abuse, clinkers, and the entrails of fish. To me, sheltering behind a ventilator, the situation seemed well out of hand. I did not know then, that a person of Van Eyke's caliber is capable of mastering most of the situations created by man. He seized a megaphone, injected into that pandemonium the mystic words *"Vingt cinq mille francs!"* and instantly silence reigned. "And *now,"* said he, "if there's any one there can talk sense and English, let him speak up."

"Comment? Vingt cinq mille francs! Pourquoi faire?"

"That's what I'm going to pay you for towing me into Arcachon."

"Mais—c'est pas possible, voyons! We have here on board, monsieur, for Royan, twenty thousand francs value of fish."

"Well, what of it? I'm buying your fish, and paying you five thousand francs besides for the tow. And, on top of that, I don't want your filthy fish. You can keep 'em. You think that over and tell your friends. And when the inward meaning of it dawns on you all, you let me know, and we'll pass you a tow-line. And if you've got any nice big soles or lobsters amongst that cargo I'm buying, you can send me over a bucketful."

I fear I shall not be able to give you an intelligent or

coherent report of the subsequent proceedings on board the *Constellation,* because I find that, when life is lived at the pace set by such men as Van Eyke, I get left behind in no time. You cannot expect a person who has been suddenly snatched into the heart of a tornado to give you an ordered and detailed account of what happened to him there. So you must bear with me.

We arrived at Arcachon under tow at daylight next morning. Arcachon is normally a sleepy little town, inhabited by Basque sardine fishers, wealthy families from Bordeaux on their summer holidays, and consumptives healing their lungs on the dry sands under the pine trees. It is proper and fitting at Arcachon to lie all day long naked on the beach, praising heaven for the hot sun, the quiet, the peace, the smell of the sea and the pines, and the chance of indulging in absolute idleness. I desired greatly to comply with the pleasant customs of the place. Instead, I was rushed ashore before breakfast in a high-powered launch, that roused with its roaring exhaust the still sleeping Arcachonnais and flooded with its wash a row of red-and-white striped bathing tents. I assisted in the placation of three outraged bathing-tent proprietors and two gendarmes. I was driven through the town in hectic spurts in a hireling motor-car, and I listened, as in a nightmare, to Van Eyke (who has no French) explaining to amazed strangers (who had no English) his multifarious, his urgent, his immediate, his instant desires. He demanded engineers: not common or garden engineers, but specialists versed in the repair of high-power Diesel motors. He desired fuel for his motors: not a gallon or so of petrol, but ten tons of fuel oil of a very definite density and a most specific flash-point. And (believe me or believe me not) he succeeded in getting these fantastic desires most adequately

complied with before breakfast, the Diesel specialists arriving from Bordeaux in a racing-car, with assurances that the fuel was following in a fleet of special tank lorries. My host then stormed a hotel and demanded breakfast: not coffee and rolls, but iced grape-fruit, buckwheat cakes and maple syrup, and two smoked haddocks. To attain an American-Scotch breakfast in a French provincial town is a miracle, but it was a miracle which Van Eyke achieved. Stimulated by this triumph he sallied out upon the town. The distinctive costume of the local fisher-people pleasing him, he accordingly purchased three dozen black berets, three dozen sea-blue fishing smocks, and three dozen scarlet blanket trousers as uniforms for himself, myself, and the *Constellation's* crew. He talked with a connoisseur of wine for eight minutes by the watch, when, declaring that he then knew all about wines, he ordered a shipment of 120 dozen. The yacht's supply of drinking water having run short and a visitor to Arcachon having, once upon a time, died of typhoid, Van Eyke so wrought upon the manager of the local chemist's shop as to convince him that an order for three tons of bottled mineral water was not a joke, or the raving of a lunatic, but *bona-fide* business, and cash business at that. Being attracted by some hand-worked linen displayed in the window of a tiny shop, Van Eyke walked in, bought the entire stock, demanded that it be sent on board his yacht, paid for it with a check on a New York bank, and walked out, leaving behind him a dazed, incredulous, and expostulating proprietress. He usurped the seat of the driver of our hireling car and dashed, with horn blowings, across forty miles of France for the sole purpose, apparently, of eating lunch in Bordeaux. In any case, the lunch eaten, he drove at breakneck speed back to Arcachon again, involving himself *en route*

with a farmer's cart and extracting himself, with a thousand franc note, from the clutches of an infuriated farmer. The beauty of the sight of turquoise-blue sardine nets drying on yellow sand against a background of dark-green pine trees caused me to exclaim, and before I understood what he was doing, Van Eyke had bought those nets! After eight hectic hours, crammed full of outrageous perpetrations such as I have attempted to outline, Van Eyke opined that Arcachon had palled upon him, and he thereupon boarded his yacht, hounded on the sweating engineers to complete the engine repairs, and rested not until the *Constellation* was once more under power and steaming out to sea.

I went on deck after dinner that night and hid myself in a dark corner. I needed peace and silence, and as perfect peace is not to be attained without tobacco, I lit my pipe. And my pipe betrayed me. At the flare of the match my host was upon me.

"Hullo!" said he. "Found a corner out of the wind? I'll join you. But, say, let's have some light. And how about a little music. I'll tell 'em to fix up the wireless and a cluster-light out here."

"Please don't trouble," I said. "To tell you the truth, I'm feeling rather tired after our hectic day."

*"Hectic!"* cried Van Eyke. "Why I haven't hit such a dull dead hole as that Arcachon place in years. If you hadn't been along to keep me company I think I'd have died of it. I'm real glad I ran you down. It's a life-saver to have some one aboard I can talk to. I've been alone here ever since I left New York; and I don't like being alone. I could have filled the yacht up with folks of course. Friends, in a way. You know what I mean. All well enough to meet at a party; but I judged I'd get mighty sick of 'em if

I had to live with them. There were dozens—men *and* women—keen to come and help me spend my money. So I left them behind, and I think I was wise—but I *know* I've been lonely. Come to think of it, I've been kind of alone all my life. Guess I've been too busy up to now to notice it. Too busy making money to make any friends. I reckon that's it. But I guess if you keep yourself hustling along hard enough you haven't time to be unhappy. So I've hustled . . . But, gee! I'll be giving us both the willies if I go on talking that way. Say. I told the skipper to go into any place there was lying around handy come breakfast-time tomorrow. He said we'd be up off La Rochelle by then, so I told him to put in there. I don't know what sort of a place it is, or if there's anything doing there; but if there is we'll do it, and if there isn't we'll hire a car and run over to Rochfort and look at the cheeses. It's twenty miles. And Cognac's only another thirty. We'll go there, too, and buy some real brandy at the source. And then we'll get back aboard and clear out of La Rochelle while it's daylight and the going's good. We might look in at La Palais that next day for an hour or two, because I hear that burg is five hundred years behind the times, and I want to see what it feels like to be dead that long. What d'you think?"

"I think," I said, "that if that's the rate you live when you're on holiday, I'd hate to keep company with you when you're at work. No wonder you're a millionaire. And no wonder you're lonely. You go ahead so fast you leave your friends behind you. Another day like the one we've had at Arcachon would be the death of me. I'm what you'd call a slacker and idle. So I'm not a millionaire. I live in peace and quietness, my friend, on considerably less than two hundred pounds a year. And I think I enjoy life. So,

while you're engaged in ravaging the province of Poitou tomorrow, I'll stay behind in La Rochelle, if you don't mind, and amuse myself quietly."

My host stood silent in the darkness for a long time. Presently I heard him sigh, and "I see," said that remarkable man. "I understand you. You mean, I'm too fast for you, too, and I'm in danger of leaving another friend behind me. You're free, of course, to do exactly what you like here. Don't worry about me. We're different breeds of men, I guess. You go slow and I go fast. But there's another difference I've kind of begun to notice since I met you. You manage to enjoy yourself somehow—and I don't. So —I'd like to stay behind with you tomorrow, friend—if you'll let me. I'd like to see how it's done."

When I explore a strange port my first steps take me towards the harbor; but I think it was the god of destiny who led Van Eyke and me next morning to that corner of La Rochelle port where lay the *Marie Thérèse.* I fell in love with the *Marie Thérèse* at sight. I sat down on a bollard and gazed at her, and the longer I looked the more she filled my eye. She was just a little fishing ketch, no bigger than the *Nellie;* but there was something about her lines and her saucy sheer and the sturdy independent way she cocked her bow in the air that attracted me immensely. Presently, as though drawn by chains, I climbed aboard. The *Marie Thérèse* was old and very dirty. She smelt of stale fish, and badly needed painting; but she was well and truly built of honest oak, and as sound as a bell. I saw that, with a little alteration down below, she would make me a yacht as perfect for my needs as my *Nellie,* so my heart went out to her—as the Fates had arranged. The Fates, too, had undoubtedly arranged that the *Marie Thérèse* should be for sale, that her owner should appear

just then, and that I should have in my pocket a check for a thousand dollars. Which things will explain why the *Marie Thérèse* belonged to me before Van Eyke and I returned at nightfall to the *Constellation.*

"Well, I don't know," remarked the *Constellation's* owner at the end of a silent dinner that night. "You were blaming me yesterday for going so fast that I left my friends behind me. But it seems to me you can move pretty quick too: I go ashore with you for what you call a quiet poke round, and before I know where I am you've bought a boat—and propose leaving *me* behind. I suppose this does mean you're leaving me?"

"You must forgive me," I said, "for deserting you; but I've got to get the boat home. I'll put some grub and water and a few stores aboard tomorrow and get away as soon as I can."

"All by yourself?"

"All by myself."

"It's going to be mighty lonely."

"Oh, I like being alone."

"I mean, *I'm* going to be lonely," said the *Constellation's* owner. And after that we said no more for a long time. I sat still and thought with delight of my new boat, of the fun of sailing her home, and the joy of quietly tinkering at her all through the coming winter. I do not know what Van Eyke was thinking of. He got up at last and "I'll wait and see you sail," said he, "and then I guess I'll get to Southampton as quick as I can and catch the first boat back. I'll quit this holidaying business. I see I'm not cut out for it, so I'll get back to work. It seems I can't make friends, or make myself happy. But I can make dollars, and if you put your soul into the game—it's interesting, anyhow. So I'll do that. But I wish you and I hadn't met. You've made

me begin to wonder if a man can gather in the gross receipts and still get the net profits. I never questioned that before; but now I'm not sure. I don't know. I guess I'll go to bed and sleep on it."

Next day the *Constellation* towed the *Marie Thérèse* to sea. There was no breath of wind upon the water, and I sat at ease, steering my shabby little ship in the wake of Van Eyke's great and splendid vessel. Van Eyke stood in the stern of his yacht, with his elbows on her taffrail and his chin in his hands. He stood like that, quite still and silent for a long time, and when I waved my hand to him he did not answer. The sun sank down behind the evening bank of cloud, flooding the sky and the sea with color. I cast off the tow rope. The gap between the two boats quickly widened. The *Constellation* gathered speed and forged ahead towards a sky that flamed with tawny gold, and her owner turned his face to the light and walked decisively forward. The *Marie Thérèse* lost way, and tossed for a while in the troubled wash the big yacht left behind her. But presently the fretful waves passed on and left her floating peacefully upon the calm face of a rose-tinted sea.

## XIII

## THE SEA LAWYERS

Old Jim King and I stood on our schooner's deck wondering what we ought to do about things. For things were most decidedly in a mess. I say "our" schooner, because Jim and I were partners, and between us we had bought the old *Emblem* two years before. But at the time I speak of the *Emblem* was, legally speaking, ours no longer, for she lay moored to a Customs buoy in Hakodate Harbor, with a bailiff's warrant nailed to her foremast, and the Japanese equivalent of a bailiff's man sitting in her cabin in possession of the ship.

"I tell you what it is," said Jim at length. "There's a darn sight too many *laws* these days; that's what's the matter. And every blamed law they've made lately's been aimed right at us. It's my belief they've got a special spite on you and me, durn 'em. No wonder we can't make an honest living. Just look how it's been ever since we got this schooner. We go off sealing in the Pribyloffs, and that's a hard enough life, Lord knows. You'd think we *earned* our money at that job an' no harm done to any one, wouldn't you? But don't you believe it. Why, every blessed Government there is gets busy about us right away. England, Canada, the States, Japan, and Russia—they all get up on their hind-legs and jump on us. 'You mustn't kill no more of them poor little seals,' they says. 'And if you dare to touch 'em again we'll jug you and confiscate your

schooner.' Hell's Bells! Did you ever hear the like of it? Well, as it's no use kicking against that crowd, we push off and try our luck after sea-otters along the Kamtchatkan coast. And what happens? Why, those damn Rooskies makes a new law immediate, of course, saying its death and destruction if any one as much as looks at a sea-otter. And there we are—done. They've bust us between them, good and proper. So we run back here to Hakodate without a bean in the world, and you'd think they'd leave us alone then. But not them! They've got a law all fixed up, ready and waiting for us, that let's a dirty little swipe of a Jap ship-chandler attach our schooner, just because we've been stopped from earning enough money to pay for a few mouldy Yens' worth of rotten stores we got off him on tick last spring."

At this point my partner relieved his feelings by spitting fiercely over the rail. Then he turned to me and went ahead again. "*So,* damn them and their laws," said he. "I'm fed up with it. Now you listen to me, pard. I've been doing some hard thinking. And what I think is this. We've kept inside all their laws up to now, and here we are at the end of it—bust. And if we don't look out they'll have this schooner off us as well before we're much older. They've got a law they can work that on, you bet. So I say, to hell with the law. Let's clear off out of this tonight, while we've still got the chance!"

"But, good Lord, Jim," said I, "you aren't really serious, are you? You can't do that sort of thing these days, man."

"I am. And you can," he replied. "What's to stop us? We wait till it's dark, batten the cabin hatch down on that blame bailiff, slip our moorings, make sail, and there we are —off! If this westerly breeze lasts out the night we'll be sixty miles off-shore by daylight. And who'll catch us then?

They haven't a thousand to one chance, and I doubt if they'll even try it."

"They won't," I said. "Because they know they're bound to get us in the long-run. We can't stay at sea for the rest of our lives. We've only got about three weeks' supply of grub aboard, for one thing. And the minute we put in anywhere we're done."

"Now you shut your head for a minute and listen," said Jim. "Didn't I tell you I'd been thinking? You remember that island in the Carolines old Wan Tai was talking about last month. I didn't take much notice of what he said then, because I judged he was just springing a fancy yarn on us to amuse himself. But yesterday I was thinking this thing out, and wondering what we could do for a living if we managed to get clear of Hakodate, when I remembered how Wan Tai'd hinted there was some juicy pickings on that island of his if we were game enough to go and look for 'em. So I went along to the fo'c'sle right away and got the whole business out of him. It seems, about five years ago, that Chink of ours was cook in a German schooner trading out of Yap. And one of the places they put in at was this atoll he was trying to tell us about. Palap's what he calls the place, and he says it's five days' sail to the south'ard of Yap. I've looked it up on the chart, and there's a reef there all right called Pelaup, which seems to show Wan Tai knows what he's talking about. From what he says I judge those squareheads were cruising around prospecting for pearl shell; but there wasn't any shell in the lagoon, so they only stayed there a few hours and then pushed off again. According to Wan Tai, the atoll's a mighty poor sort of place. There's nothing much of anything there and nobody living on it, so those Germans didn't even go ashore. But Wan Tai says he did.

He went to see if he could find some sea-birds' eggs. That seems reasonable enough, because you know what those Chinks are: always poking about looking for grub and stuff where no white man'd ever trouble himself going. Well—there wasn't any eggs, and Wan Tai was just going off again to where the schooner was anchored in the lagoon, when he thought he'd take a look at the beach on the wind'ard side of the atoll. And I'm glad he did, because he swears he found that beach just lousy with turtle. Hawksbill they were at that, and that, my lad, in case you don't know it, means tortoiseshell. But you can trust a Chinaman to know it. He knew very well he was looking at a small fortune crawling around there on that beach. He knew enough, too, to keep his mouth shut. He knew if he told those Germans what he'd found, they'd swipe the lot for a certainty, and he'd be lucky if he got as much as a dollar out of it. So he went back aboard and kept quiet, and he says that ever since then he's been trying to get to that island again and collect that tortoiseshell. He's been afraid to talk too much, because he couldn't trust any one not to go off and scoop the pool and leave him out of it. But he says he trusts us to give him a square deal, and that's why he told me. And I'll say right out I think we're mugs if we don't have a shot at it, especially the way things are now. As I see it, there's a young fortune on that reef just waiting for us to go and get it. I'm all set to go and have a try, anyhow; but you're my partner, and it's up to you to say Yes or No. But don't forget, pard, if you say No you'll have to stop in Hakodate and starve and rot there. And so'll I!"

I have reported all I can remember of Jim's remarks, because I wish to make it clear that it was necessity, not inclination, which caused me to become something most

uncomfortably akin to a thief and a pirate. For we did run away with the schooner precisely as Jim had planned. Also we abducted that bailiff's man. And it seems to me we more or less tried to steal those turtles, or, at any rate, poach them. However, we did eventually pay that Japanese ship-chandler his money. And the bailiff's man, I consider, came very well out of his adventure, and on the whole, enjoyed himself and had a good time. I feel we can claim credit for that much, at any rate, for we could so easily, you understand, have marooned the man or thrown him overboard.

Our voyage down to the island remains in my mind as a most unpleasant episode. From Hakodate to Pelaup is something over 2000 miles—a three weeks' passage for a schooner in average weather, and we had a bare three weeks' supply of food on board. We cleared from Hakodate in the middle of March, walked straight into a hard sou'-westerly gale which lasted a week, blew us 300 miles out of our course, and made us realize thus early that the way of the transgressor is, in very truth, hard. We had, you see, consumed one week's stores, and were farther away from our destination than when we started. Further, we dare not put in anywhere to replenish supplies, even if we had had the money to pay for them. There remained only one thing to do, and we did it. We put all hands on half rations. This sounds very nice and simple, but I should like to state here that half rations are much worse than they sound when you read about them in the sea romances. Half rations begin to pall on me personally in about eight hours. After a few days on a strict diet of half rations I feel very sick, and my legs wobble. When I have been on half rations for a week I am human no longer, but merely a palsied stomach ravening for food.

And Jim tells me I am a very light eater. Consider, then, the sufferings of Jim, who weighs over 200 lbs., and who does not consider any meal complete until he has eaten at least three pounds of meat, to say nothing of trimmings. And I have seen the four lusty Bonin Islanders who formed our crew tuck away a 20 lb. sucking pig between them, without extending themselves unduly; while Wan Tai, our cook, considered three heaped basins of rice a mere foundation for the rest of his normal day's nutriment. I hope you will understand, therefore, that the crew of the *Emblem* were glad when, six weeks later, they observed the cocoanut trees on Pelaup sticking up at last over the horizon.

We closed in with the land, and looked at the place we were relying on to provide us with both food and fortune. It did not look promising. Imagine a saucer full of water lying in a pond, with one-third of its edge just showing above the surface. Make that saucer eight miles across from rim to rim, turn the pond into the Pacific Ocean, and there you have Pelaup—just a shallow lagoon, with a low narrow crescent of sand on its western side and a thin line of submerged reef encircling the rest of it. There was nothing else there, except a ragged line of cocoanut palms along the bank of sand, and I remember still how my heart sank as I gazed at that barren atoll.

I climbed up into the fore cross-trees to con the schooner through the narrow gap in the reef which formed the entrance into the lagoon. Ahead of us the dark-blue waters met a line of white and glittering foam. Breaking that line was a streak of palest green, while beyond, across a stretch of opal where the lagoon waters gleamed, lay a sandy beach all golden in the sun. But do not imagine I saw these things quite like that just then. The shining

foam hid a wicked coral reef; the pale green streak was the passage through which we had to sail, and it looked very, very narrow. Opal-tinted waters meant only shoals and coral-heads to me, and as for those golden sands, they looked very bare and naked, and I could not see a turtle on them. So you must forgive me for not describing all the beauty and the color that was there. It filled my eye indeed; but the sad fact is, an eye full of beauty is most unsatisfying if your belly and your pockets are quite empty.

We brought the schooner up in five fathoms under the lee of the island, put a boat overboard, and went ashore to explore. It does not take eight hungry and anxious mariners very long to explore a strip of land some two miles long by 200 yards wide, so that within an hour our survey was completed. We had discovered a few hundred cocoanut palms, all more or less in bearing, about two dozen mangy pandanus trees, a few tufts of coarse sea-grass, an infinity of hermit crabs; but no water and no turtles! We sat down, scratched our heads and looked at each other, and then all hands settled down to cursing our cook for leading us into this trouble. And that Chinaman merely grinned. Then said he, "Plenty cocoanut. Cocoanut velly good. Plenty eat. Plenty dlink. Catchee fish. Catchee clab. Bymbye turtle he come. Lay egg. Then all light!" And after delivering himself of this profound statement, Wan Tai walked off and commenced gathering crabs in a bucket.

I do not remember that we argued much more after that about what we were to do. Wan Tai seemed to have settled it all. We were, you see, not very sure of ourselves; but there was something as sure and as inevitable as death about that Chinaman. According to him, the turtle were bound to come ashore some time or other and lay their eggs, and all we had to do was to wait for them. So we

decided to wait. The lagoon, thank heaven, was full of fish, and Wan Tai (thank heaven again) could tell at a glance which fish were good to eat and which were deadly poison. Our bread was cocoanuts; our drink the liquor they contained. Also we scooped a well in the sand, which yielded a certain amount of brackish but drinkable water.

With our stomachs filled our strength returned to us, and we looked round and about, as strong men will, for something to do. It was Jim who thought we ought to make something out of the sharks while we were waiting for the turtles. For our lagoon fairly swarmed with sharks, and, as luck would have it, two of our Bonin Islanders had once made a voyage to Marcus Island aboard a Japanese shark-hunting schooner, and they knew the tricks of this queer trade. According to them and Jim, there was a deal of money to be made out of dried shark's tails and fins, which it seemed are sold as table delicacies in the Chinese market; while the cured skins fetch high prices as shagreen. It all sounded very simple and nice, and, when Jim pointed out that the turtles we were waiting for might not come after all, we set to there and then and turned our atoll into a factory for the manufacture of assorted shark products.

The manufacture of shark products is, I regret to say, a very filthy business, and, after my experience of it, I am in a strong position to state that it is a career which should be embarked upon only by those who have been born without a sense of smell. For a shark is an evil-smelling brute at the best of times; but if you catch from thirty to forty large sharks every day for two months and skin them, cut off their fins and tails, spread these trophies out in the sun to dry and fling the unwanted corpses into a shallow lagoon, you are then going to generate so mighty a

stench that you will assuredly frighten yourself. I do not propose to go into details about that stench, because, although I left that atoll some fourteen years ago, I can smell it distinctly still, and I wish to forget it. I think I must state, however, as a point of scientific interest, that the scent of dead shark can work its way at least a quarter of a mile dead to windward against the strength of a fresh Trade wind. It seems to me, too, that the attention of our War Office authorities should be drawn to the significant fact that, in the presence of one form of virulent poison gas, white men lie down and vomit and wish they were dead; Bonin Islanders gasp and spit, but carry on with their jobs; while Chinamen grow pensive. But a Japanese will stand around and wonder what the dickens it can be the other men are making such a fuss about.

At the end of two long months of suffering (about which I will not particularize, because I do not wish to make any gentle reader sick) the crew of the *Emblem* had perpetrated a collection of some 2000 more or less sun-dried shark-skins, plus tails and fins to match. We did not load these spoils aboard the schooner, preferring to leave them spread out on the beach for the sun and the wind to continue their healing work upon them as long as possible. Wherein, I regret to say, we made a mistake. For those variegated shark products of ours were (and we ought to have foreseen it) an offense not only to man but an abomination to the very gods themselves. There came one calm hot day. It was very calm and very, very hot; and I think, towards the end of it, a whiff from our pestilential atoll must have penetrated even unto Heaven, where it outraged the occupants. In any case, whatever the cause, that night a typhoon burst upon us, blowing like all the furies out of the north-east. The schooner was moored to two an-

chors, with a full scope of chain out on each, and the anchors must have got a good grip of the coral bottom, because we did not drag ashore. It was the reef to windward that saved us, of course. It broke the sea; but even so the waves which got up in the five-mile stretch of lagoon swept the *Emblem* continually. We pitched bows under, and then, on the top of each sea, we tautened out our cables with such an awful jar that I feared the windlass, or perhaps the very bows themselves, would be torn right out of us. The wind itself I shall not attempt to describe, because I do not wish to be called a liar. Who will believe me, for instance, if I say that little Hisatomi, our shanghaied broker's man, being foolish enough to face the wind with his mouth open, thereupon blew up like a football bladder, and doubtless would have died had the blast not flung him on to a fife-rail full of belaying pins which promptly deflated him. To those who think that in thus stretching Hisatomi I am also stretching the truth, I would say: Hire a motor-car capable of proceeding at one hundred miles per hour. Then spur the machine to its best efforts, open your mouth, poke your head over the windscreen, and note the results. When convalescent, I pray you ruminate on the fact that our typhoon was certainly blowing at about 130 miles per hour—and absolve this poor teller of tales from the sin of exaggeration.

After blowing in this man-killing manner for nine everlasting hours, the typhoon paused for breath, and then sprang at us again out of the south-west, blowing harder than ever. This time, though, we had a better time of it, because the shift of wind put us close under the lee of the island, and therefore in smooth water. We were busy congratulating ourselves on this fact when we observed the seas beginning to breach clean over the island. In the or-

dinary course of events this would not have mattered much, because I doubt if the wash of the breakers over the land was more than a foot in depth at the worst. That foot of water could not do us or the island very much harm; but it was fatal to our hard-won accumulation of shark products. We watched the piles of skins and tails, those fragrant fruits of two months' desperate toil, vanish from the beach between two seas, the while I gnashed my teeth and wept, our Bonin Islanders cursed, Hisatomi smiled, Wan Tai harpooned with a boat-hook a skin which drifted past, and old Jim said, "Well, anyway, that's the end of that damned stink at all events."

When the weather calmed down we all went ashore and reviewed the situation. Half the cocoanut trees were blown down; our well had vanished, and so had all our shark products. Every single product. We held a council of war, and decided that, as there were still fish in the lagoon, enough cocoanuts left on the trees, and a new well to be had for the digging, we might as well stay where we were, cure some more shark skins, and wait for Wan Tai's turtle to appear. And no sooner was this desperate decision taken than our luck turned. I was poking about on the seaward beach on the chance of something useful having been washed up there by the blow; but, finding nothing except some cone-shaped shells with the fish alive inside them, I gathered a few and took them to our cook to find out if they were good for eating. They were large shells, from two to four inches across the base, and their inside surface gleamed with a mother-of-pearl-like luster. Old Wan Tai regarded them, as I did, merely as food, and he boiled them that evening for supper. He served them steaming in a pail, and as soon as they appeared Jim seized one, gazed at it for a moment with awe and wonder

in his eye, and then cried out in a loud voice, "Hell's Delight! If it isn't a trochus!"

"Are they good to eat, Jim?" I asked.

And "Eat!" cried he. "Why, you fool, it's a *trochus*. Where the Flames did you get it from?"

"On the wind'ard beach," I said. "There must be a couple of hundred of them there. Are they worth anything?"

Jim is not an excitable sort of person. He is too big and heavy for one thing; but on that occasion he showed more signs of excitement than I have seen upon him before or since. He sprang to his feet, danced a little dance, kicked our dinner-pail of shell-fish a good ten yards, ran across the atoll to the beach, and when presently he came back again he had a big shell in each hand, and he was singing. And as the only time I had ever heard Jim sing before was when he drew a winning ticket in the Manila lottery, I knew we had struck luck.

"Washed up off the reef by the blow," said he. "So the odds are there's a lot more where these came from. We'll take the boat and have a look-see first thing tomorrow and make sure. But they're certain to be there all right. The cursed thing is, here we've been messing about all this time inside the lagoon skinning those stinking sharks and all the while the reef outside's been fairly crawling with *these*. And we didn't know it! This is the stuff they make pearl buttons out of, and the last time I was in Kobe it was fetching as high as Yen eight hundred a ton. Let's see. If there's enough on the reef to fill the schooner, and I'll bet there is, we ought to get away with a good eighty ton of it. And eight hundred by eighty is sixty-four thousand—say sixty-four hundred pounds. By Gosh, pard! This is better than turtles. We've struck a fortune!"

Next morning bright and early we pulled the whaleboat over the reef and rowed her around the seaward side of the atoll until we were off the beach where the shells had been washed ashore. We stood off in about three fathoms, and our four Bonin men slipped overboard and vanished below. They remained down there for a minute or more, until I began to feel choky and think of the sharks. But presently up the men bobbed again, dropped eight large shells into the boat, and hung on to our gunwale, grinning. They reported the state of the bottom as being "lousy with shell. Big ones and plenty." So we moved on and repeated the process. When our survey was done, we had established the fact that the shell was thick on a patch about three cables long between the three and four fathom lines, and that at greater or lesser depths little shell was to be found. Said Jim, "Good enough. There's more down there than will fill the schooner, so we'll call it a day's work and go ashore and get the thing organized."

This seems to me to be a good time to explain the powers of our Bonin men in the swimming line, because I hear some one asking loudly how it is than any man can stay down in 24 feet of shark-infested water for a minute or more, and come up alive and smiling. Be it known, then, that all Bonin Islanders are born and bred in the water, and swim like fishes from birth. I have even heard that some of them are web-footed, and while I do not state this as a fact, it delights me to believe it. I do know, however, that a lusty Bonin Islander thinks nothing of diving into four fathoms of water and crawling about on the bottom for eighty seconds or more, just for the fun of the thing. After a minute and a half he usually likes to come up for a breath of fresh air; but ninety seconds is by no means

the limit for a good man. I once lost an anchor in about five fathoms off Agrigan, and Webb, my Bonin Island bo'sun, went overboard to look for it. He was diving continuously for more than an hour before he found it, and he then took down a line, made it fast, lifted the anchor out of a hole in the coral where it was jammed, and the whole business took him a little over two minutes. So you see! As for the sharks, they are, in spite of all the terrible fierceness attributed to them by the novelists, in reality the most wretched and cowardly set of brutes to be found on the land or in the sea. A shark can be put into a panic merely by splashing water at him, and I have seen little naked boys joyfully engaged in the pleasant pastime of tackling fifteen-foot tiger sharks in their own element and ripping their stomachs up for them with a knife in the most graceful and nonchalant manner. A shark, it is true, is a ravenous creature, and if he sees anything that looks like food, he naturally proceeds to eat it. But the point I wish to make is: if the prospective meal merely turns round, looks the shark in the eye and says "Boo," then that shark will immediately remove himself at great speed into the next ocean. It will be understood, therefore, that our Bonin men merely regarded the sharks as you would regard mosquitoes. When diving they kept a weather eye lifting in case some unsophisticated shark made a mistake and tried to lunch off them. When this happened they would give that shark a slap in the face or a kick in the stomach, and send him rushing off in a perfect frenzy of terror.

Our trochus fishing was hard work. We set out early each day in our two boats, with two Bonin men and Wan Tai in Jim's boat and the remaining two divers and Hisatomi in mine. When we got to the fishing grounds one

diver from each boat would go overboard, taking down with him a weighted canvas bag, with a line from the boat attached to it. If he chanced on a place where the shell lay very thick, the diver would fill his bag within thirty seconds, when he came up to the boat and rested, while we pulled up the bag and emptied it on the bottom boards. If the shell was scattered and patchy, it took perhaps a minute to fill the bag; but there was so much shell on our reef that the men were seldom below longer than forty seconds. One man would generally dive a dozen times in succession, when we would pull him into the boat to rest while his mate went overboard and continued the business. By this method one diver in each boat was always resting, and the work went ahead fast. At the end of each day we usually had as much as a ton and a half of shell in the boats, or £120 worth, as Jim was careful to point out. The four divers had the hardest time of it; but they did not mind that, because we worked on a system of shares. There were six shares for the schooner, two each for Jim and me, one each for Wan Tai and Hisatomi, and three each for the four divers; and a Bonin man does not care how hard he works if his labor is netting him some £15 per day. The divers, moreover, were excused all other work. They got the shell and the rest of us collected food, fished, cooked, tended the schooner and the boats, and spread out each day's catch of shell to rot on the beach.

It seems to have been our fate all the time we were on that atoll to make the most abominable smells. Our shark products were an offense to Heaven, as I have already hinted; but we very soon discovered that rotting shark is to deliquescent trochus as is a bunch of violets to an over-ripe Limburger—only considerably more so. The

trochus is a big shell, and all its interior spirals are cram-full of fish. When taken out of the water this fish unfortunately expires. This would not matter much if one were able to extricate him as one does a winkle from its shell. But the trochus apparently loves his home. He is attached to it, and clings to it desperately even after death, so that the only thing to do to render the shell fit for the market is to leave it on the beach for a while for the sun and the crabs to get at it. After a week or two of this fresh air treatment the horrid fragments that remain may be washed out by waggling the shell about under water. I do not advise any one to undertake this cleansing work, though, unless he has an iron nerve, a copper-lined stomach, blue glasses, and a clothes-peg clipped to his nose.

By the end of August we had collected enough shell on the beach to fill the *Emblem* and give her a deck load as well, so we rested a while from our labors, shifted the schooner well to windward of our maturing trochus, and sat down to wait for the last of the shell to rot. As nearly as we could estimate we had 90 tons of the stuff, worth over £7000, which, on our share system, worked out at £1500 each for Jim and myself, £900 for each of the divers, and £600 between Wan Tai and Hisatomi. We had all had a very poor time; but we agreed that the result was worth it, and I think Hisatomi, to whom Yen 3000 was wealth indeed, was the best pleased man of the lot. He blessed us in fact for having shanghaied him, and informed us that when he got home again he proposed to keep his mouth shut and buy a farm in Osumi, which is about as far from Hakodate as it is possible to get in Japan.

When all the shell was rotted out and washed clean we commenced to load it. By that time we had quite forgotten

about Wan Tai's alleged turtles, and we had filled the hold with our shell and were actually in process of stowing the last ten tons of it on deck preparatory to sailing, when Wan Tai's turtles arrived. The first day we caught fifteen of them, all big hawksbill, with shells on them worth heaven knows what. We did not know ourselves, but we were certain tortoiseshell was a great deal more valuable even than trochus. The following day we got eleven turtles, and the next only three; but then there was a rush, and in five days we got fifty-four. After that the run stopped, and no more turtles came ashore; but as we judged we had by then made another little fortune, we did not care very much.

"Tomorrow," said Jim, "we'll get all the water we can into our tanks, fill up with green nuts, and set to catching fish and sun-drying them until we've got enough to get us as far as Macao. For Macao's where we've got to go. It's a Portuguese port, and it's our best bet by a long way. Those Portugooses don't care a damn if your papers are all correct and proper or not. All they're after is palm-oil. I'll guarantee, if we go the right way about it, we'll be able to get a brand-new set of ship's papers at Macao, and it oughtn't to cost us too much either. Anyhow, we've got to put in somewhere, and that's the only place. Where else is there? Japan's no go. Yap's German, and you know what they are for papers and red tape. Manila's Yank, so we'll be skinned alive if we go there. And you might just as well put your head into Scotland Yard as go to Hong-kong or Singapore the way we're fixed just now. There's nowhere else left bar the Dutch ports down Java way, and those squareheads are just bung-full of laws and such, especially sea laws. They'd have the schooner and the shell off us before we could look round, and stuff us in clink,

too. We *might* try the China coast and put in somewhere where it isn't a Treaty Port. But I mistrust those Chinks. They aren't strong on law, I'll say that for 'em, but if they smell our dollars, the Lord help us. So you see. It's Macao or nowhere."

"Macao it is then," said I. "You're right, Jim. We ought to be able to get rid of our cargo there without much bother if we lay out some judicious bribes in the right quarters. We'll have to keep ourselves well out of sight of the British Consul, though. For there's certain to be a Consul there, and if once *he* begins sniffing round, we're in for more trouble—and I've had all the trouble I need this trip."

Next morning all hands were busy preparing for our departure. The Bonin men were fishing, Wan Tai and Hisatomi had gone ashore in one of the boats for cocoanuts and water, while Jim and I were overhauling the schooner's gear, getting her ready for sea. I went up aloft to reeve off a new throat halyard, and before setting to work I took a look around the horizon as a sailor usually does. I did not expect to see anything, of course, because we were in a part of the world where ships seldom go. Also we had not sighted a sail of any sort since leaving Hakodate, five months before, so that by then it seemed quite natural and proper to have an empty sea around us all to ourselves. I nearly fell out of the rigging, therefore, when I observed the square topsails of a vessel sticking up above the horizon to the eastward, with a long trail of smoke blowing out to leeward. "Sail ho!" I cried; and Jim, on deck, dropped with a clatter the bucket he was holding, and stared up at me with his eyes and mouth wide open like three great O's. "She's a barkentine with auxiliary steam, by the look of her," I went on. "And she's

heading end on for the island and coming up fast."

"Damn," said Jim. "If she's coming in here it's going to be awkward. They'll spot what we've been up to; they're bound to talk, and that'll make trouble for us, sure. And, anyway, I wanted to keep it dark where we'd got our trochus from, and come back again and clean up the reef."

In an hour the vessel was visible from our deck, and it was clear she was steering for the lagoon entrance and meant to come inside. As she closed with the land, we made her out to be a three-masted topsail schooner of some three or four hundred tons, with a short yellow funnel on top of her house amidships. She was painted white, and had a smarter look about her than the ordinary run of island schooners, so that we were puzzled to make her business out.

"Maybe she's a yacht," said Jim, staring at her through the glasses. "It don't seem natural; but what else can she be? She's got too many hands aboard for a trading vessel, the boats in her davits are varnished, and she's a mess of bright work aft. And if she *is* a yacht, maybe it won't be so bad after all. They won't know the ropes round these parts, and we ought to be able to fool 'em. We'll tell 'em we've been getting our shell somewhere to the westward —Ponapi, say, and came in here short of grub and water. That's an idea! There ought to be some fine fancy pickings aboard a yacht in the grub line, and I could do with a bit of juicy steak between my teeth again—not to mention beer. I'm beginning to feel glad she's turned up, after all. Ah! hold on. They're hoisting their ensign now. It's—— *What!* Oh, hell and damnation, it's the German flag!"

Jim put down the glasses, and we looked at each other with dismay, for that German flag promised us trouble of

the very worst kind. In those days, you see, the Carolines belonged to Germany, and the Germans are notoriously jealous of their rights of trade. And Jim and I knew very well that they allowed no vessel to trade, or even touch at any island in the group, unless she had first passed the Customs at either Yap or Ponapi, and purchased a trading license.

"Our luck's gone bad on us," said Jim. "I can guess what that boat is now easy enough. She's a Government vessel, as sure as eggs is eggs—an' we're caught. They'll send aboard us as soon as she brings up, and they'll want to see our papers first go off. We might have a chance in a hundred to bluff 'em about our not having a clearance; but if we say we've lost our trading license they've only got to take us in to Yap to find out we never had one. Then they'll confiscate the schooner, fine us over the license, jug us for poaching their shell, and shoot me probably for saying what I think of 'em. And just *think* of the beggars getting hold of all our good shell! It makes me crying mad to think of it. *What* to do? What to *do?* All I can think of is to swear we only ran in here in distress, being short of water, and then run up old Blood and Guts, and dare the blighters to touch us. Or we might say some of our hands are down with smallpox. That might scare 'em off. Failing that we'll just have to stand by, see what turns up, and act according."

"Let's hope she isn't a Government boat," I said. "If she is, it won't be much use trying to fool her. They aren't mugs. There they go now, shortening sail. She's going to steam inside, so it isn't even any use praying she'll run herself on a coral-head and stove her bilge in."

The schooner steamed towards us up the lagoon in style. She came along full speed, with a bone in her teeth, and

it was plain to us, from the way her Skipper handled her, that this was not the first time he had been inside the lagoon. She seemed full of men, and we counted eight hands on the fo'c'sle head alone. She brought up handsomely within half a cable's length of us, and then, exactly as Jim had foretold, they lowered a boat and pulled alongside us. In the stern sheets sat a round perspiring personage in white duck and a large topee, and on his shoulders were two gold stripes, which somehow looked most ominous to me. "Good-morning, Captain," said he, in fair English, as his boat ranged alongside. "Where from and where bound, if you please?"

"British schooner *Emblem,*" replied Jim promptly. "Guam for Manila with a cargo of shell; but we got blown off here to the south'ard by a typhoon and ran out of water, so I put in here for some. We got here yesterday, and I'd ask you aboard only some of my hands are down very sick."

"Ach! So?" said the German. "That is bad. I will send you my Doctor aboard. My ship is the *Jaguar,* what you would call the Government Fishery Inspections ship. And I am Oberleutnant Hagan, in command of the *Jaguar,* and Acting Inspector of Fishing also. I see you have had luck. A deck-load of trochus! Fresh shell, I see. I have not heard before of the trochus at Guam. And you met with a typhoon also? You have great luck, indeed, that your decks were not swept clean. Great luck, Captain. It is now my duty to desire to see your ship's papers. A formality only. When that is done you will honour me to drink beer aboard the *Jaguar*. I am now two months out from Ponapi, cruising through the outer isles; but I nevertheless three cases of good lager have still left, which will last me, I hope, till Yap. So! Your papers, Captain, if you please."

"Hold on a minute, Lieutenant," I said. "We'd show you our papers if they'd be a comfort to you; but this is a British ship. We only put in here in distress, and we deny your right to demand our papers. We don't want to make trouble; but, on principle, we must refuse to show our papers. So it's up to you to take what action you like. But I warn you. We're a British ship, and you'll only get yourself into trouble if you don't leave us alone."

"A British ship, yes—*but* in German waters," replied the lieutenant calmly. "So I have the right which I—*demand!*"

"Nothing doing," said Jim. "We stand pat, Lieutenant. The next move's yours; but you'd better be careful, or you'll land yourself in a mess. You'd much better forget about our papers and take us aboard your ship for that beer you were talking about."

Then said that confounded German, grinning, "You do not lie well, Captain. Perhaps you deceive my eyes and my ears, but not my nose. No. You have rotted your shell on this beach. We understand *that* very well as soon as our ship comes to leeward of the island. And now you will not your papers show, I comprehend you perfectly. So. I must my duty do. I restrain. I arrest. I tow you to Yap. I think there you will be confiscate."

Such was the verdict. And that Lieutenant, in his own way, was a diplomat. He was very sure of his ground, and merely chuckled at our threats and remonstrances. "You are caught with the cat in the bag, Captain," said he. "We will go to Yap, and His Excellency the Governor and your Herr Consul they will fight about the legality of confiscation. So why shall *we* fight? It is without sense. Also I have too many men for you. We will therefore aboard the *Jaguar* go and our good beer drink." And like

two fools we went. We got our beer, it is true, and it was very good beer; but once aboard the *Jaguar* we found we had to stop there, Hagan dissuading us from returning to our schooner with tact, more beer, and an armed guard over the gangway. That night he showed us into a two-berth cabin—and locked us in. When we woke up in the morning the *Jaguar* was under way, and by craning our necks out of the porthole we could see our schooner at the end of a tow-line astern of her.

"This is all damn fine," said Jim after breakfast on deck that morning. "Hagan's doing us pretty well considering; but I'm jiggered if I'm going to stand by and let any blame German get away with the *Emblem* and over ten thousand pounds' worth of shell as easy as all this. It's a sure thing, if we ever get to Yap we're done for. We've been properly caught with the goods on us, and it's not a bit of good trying to dodge that. So I'll tell you what it is. We've got to get aboard the schooner somehow and give the *Jaguar* the slip."

"Talk sense, Jim," I said. "Hagan's put four men aboard the *Emblem,* and, of course, they're armed. There's a sentry on this end of the tow-rope, and Hagan's shown us already he's no fool. He's leaving us pretty well to ourselves; but you can be sure some one's got an eye on us all the time. And even supposing we did manage to get aboard the schooner, we'd be no better off then. To hear you talk, one would think all we had to do was to cut away our tow-line and sail off. You seem to have forgotten the *Jaguar's* got an engine."

"No. I haven't forgotten anything as far as I know," replied Jim. "I can see all right, without you telling me, our chances are mighty thin; but if you think I'm going to sit here and not make a bid for the schooner and all the

shell we've been busting our soul-cases to get, then you don't know me. I've thought out a plan. I know it ain't a good one. It's more than likely to fail; but we'll have a shot at it all the same, because I'd sooner pass out altogether than take this lying down. I reckon this old tub's doing about six knots now, and she ought to fetch Yap in four days, so we've got to act quick. Now I guess old Hagan'll lock us up in our cabin again tonight; but as soon as we've had dinner and it's dark, we'll come on deck. I'll take the starboard side and you take the port. We'll start from for'ard and chuck every coil of rope we can lay our hands on over the side. There's all the boat falls for one thing and those two drums of mooring wire aft. If we can only get enough rope towing astern, you see, some of it's bound to get foul of the propeller and bring the engines up with a round turn. If we do it quiet, maybe they won't spot us. In any case I count on there being the very devil of a riot. You know what these squareheads are. They'll all be rushing about and gettin' 'emselves excited, and they won't have time to attend to us. Then, this old box being fat in the face and flying light, she'll soon lose her way through the water. But the *Emblem* won't. She's deep and heavy. She'll overrun us. With luck she'll run into our stern and smash the rudder. Anything might happen. Anyhow, you bet there'll be the devil of a hoo-hoo going on. That'll be our chance. We'll get aboard the schooner somehow. Jump and swim for it if necessary. And once aboard we'll be eight to four, counting in Wan Tai and Hisatomi, and so, with luck, we might manage to get clear. It's a poor show; but we'll try it. It'll stir things up nicely aboard here, anyhow, and we owe the blighters something on account."

We spent the rest of that day working out the details

of Jim's scheme. We noted the position of all ropes lying handy for throwing over the side, and by dinner-time we had thought of some more little touches which we hoped might help to put the *Jaguar* out of action long enough to give us a chance to escape.

It surprises me still when I remember what a mess two men can make of a poor unsuspecting ship if they know what they are about, do not worry too much about the consequences, and have enough darkness to play in. At nine that night Jim cut through the main throat and peak halyards, while I let go the topping lift. The mainsail thereupon came down on deck with a run, the jaws of the gaff carried away, while the boom smashed on to the bulwarks and broke. All hands, including the look-out on the fo'c'sle, immediately ran aft to see what calamity had descended on the ship, so Jim and I sneaked forward under cover of the racket, opened the compressors, eased off the windlass brakes, and let go the *Jaguar's* two patent anchors with a hundred fathoms of cable attached to each. With some thousand fathoms of water beneath the ship those anchors had plenty of scope to sink. The chains accordingly ran out through the hawse-pipes with a roar as of big gun barrages functioning at highest pressure; the whole ship shuddered and shook; the fo'c'sle head became enveloped in a cloud of flying rust and sparks, and Jim and I left there in a hurry. On our way aft we cut the upper fore-topsail halyards, and the yard ran down with a frenzied flapping of canvas and broke off on the cap. We let go the falls of the two boats hanging outboard in their davits, threw every coil of rope we could reach overboard, dropped two small boat anchors and a crowbar down the engine-room skylight, jammed the steering gear with a marlin-spike, and by 9:05 P. M. we stood at the taffrail

ready to jump aboard the *Emblem* as soon as we could make her out.

The *Jaguar* lay with her engines stopped, from forward came sounds of incredible activity, while broad off on our quarter and half a mile away shone a little green light. "Hell!" said Jim, catching sight of it. "There she is, and we're too far off to swim for it. They must have cast off and sheered clear of us as soon as the engines stopped. I never thought of that. Everything else went off so prime, too! All except the finishing touch. It's a pity. Well, we did our best, and you can't do more than that. It might be wise for us to go below now, and turn in and leave old Hagan to clear up our mess. I guess they'll be pretty mad if they tumble to it it's us they've got to thank for this little lot. Let's make ourselves scarce."

We did.

We were lying in our bunks, wide awake and snoring, when our cabin door was thrown open and Hagan burst in. The man was in such a state of fury that at first I made sure he was going to shoot us. He had a lot to say, too; but as he said nearly all of it in German, a language I am not familiar with, I regret I am unable to report his remarks. I do remember, though, a phrase resembling, "Verfloosch schwinehounds," which I think, under some circumstances, must be a very comforting thing to say.

I propose to be vague about the subsequent proceedings aboard that ship, because, when a man has had indignities heaped upon him and then talks about them, he is more apt to be laughed at than pitied. Also, I must admit that Jim and I probably earned nearly all those Germans gave us, so that it does not do to whine. Suffice it to say, therefore, that for the rest of the passage Jim and I lived solely on biscuit and water, and very little of that. On this diet

we sweated up, by hand, 120 fathoms of chain cable from the *Jaguar's* lower hold, and stowed it in her chain lockers. I am glad to say, however, that during that time the *Jaguar's* crew were also by no means idle. They had that propeller to clear for one thing, and judging by the fuss they made over it, that must have been a tough and exasperating job. It comforts me, too, when I remember it took them three long days and nights to square up a mess which Jim and I made in five minutes.

On the sixth day after this little affair the *Jaguar,* with the *Emblem* in tow, raised the island of Yap above the northern horizon. In those days Yap was the seat of the German administration in the Carolines, and Jim and I knew very well that once we were put ashore there we were done for. "It don't look as if we'd got the chance of a snowball in hell now," said Jim, as we approached the land. "I don't know if we've got a Consul here; but even if there is one he'll have a job to do us any good. We're in the soup this time, mate."

As he spoke, a small steamer cleared the point of land ahead and, turning, steamed towards us. She was a long low craft with four funnels, and from the size of her bow wave we could see she was coming along at speed. As we watched her there was a flash from her forward deck, something went "Shee-ooooof!" above our heads, and there came to our ears a sound as of a viciously slammed door.

"Destroyer practicing," said Jim. "And if you ask me he'd better be careful. That shot of his came mighty near us, seems to me. They're a careless lot of swine these Germans. That *is* the German man-o'-war flag he's flying, ain't it? It's white with a black cross. No. Red, by God! Pard! That's the White Ensign!"

The destroyer turned, a string of flags ran up to her mast-

head, and presently there arose from our after-deck the sound of highly excited Germans cursing. Then "Sheee-oooo, crump weee-izz," came another shell, and Jim and I gazed, thunderstruck, at a column of water and spray which sprang amazingly from the sea close ahead of us. "Suffering Mike!" cried Jim, "they're shooting *at* us!" As we gazed at each other in amaze we heard the engine-room telegraph clang, the engines stopped, and I looked aft in time to see the German flag run down from our gaff end and flutter to the deck.

"Beats me," said Jim. "All hands gone mad, or else *I* have. I suppose we aren't dreaming, are we?"

The destroyer steamed up close and dropped a boat into the water, and we saw when it came alongside that it was full of bluejackets, all armed and all grinning. An officer, followed by most of the men, climbed out of the boat on to our deck. He saluted Hagan, who looked as though he was on the verge of a fit. Our fat Lieutenant stood there with his eyes bulged and his mouth wide open, and he said no word; but presently he returned the salute stiffly, and then stumbled down the cabin companion like a dazed and drunken man. The Englishman followed him below, and Jim and I, able to bear this mystery no longer, rushed towards the bluejackets, who stood in a group at the stern.

"'Ullo," said a large man, presenting the point of his bayonet at my stomach. "'Ands *up!* That is, unless you hanker for a nasty great hole in your gut. That's it. *Right* up, mister. Now, 'oo are you?"

"Don't shoot," I cried. "We're English. That schooner astern belongs to us. We're prisoners. They've arrested us for fishing in their waters. But never mind that. For pity's sake, man, tell me the meaning of all this. What's it all about?"

"Meanin'," said the large man. "Why, where 'ave you blown in from, cully? Don't you know there's a war on?"

*"War?"* I cried. "War! What war? D'you mean to tell me England and Germany——I say, you're not joking, are you?"

"No jokes about me," replied the man. "But how long have you been out that you haven't heard about it?"

"Look here, my friend," I said, "we left Hakodate last April. We haven't spoken a soul since, except this German. And the last port he touched at was Ponapi sometime in July. Now, you tell me quick what's happened or I'll blow up."

"Strike me perishing pink," said the large sailor. "No wonder we gave you a surprise. Well, you stand by, mate, an' I'll surprise you some more. There's been bloody wars carryin' on since the middle of August. We're in, with France an' Russia an' Beljoom and various odd details. An' Germany an' Austria and all their sparring partners they're on the other side. All hands has been blinding and stiffing and scrapping good and hearty up to now. There's been great doings, and old Kitch reckons it's all going to last three years. How does that strike you?"

It struck me personally all of a heap. I gasped and then was silent as I tried to focus in my mind some of the implications of this stunning piece of news. Not so Jim, however. Jim was ever the more practical member of our partnership. Said he, "Holy Wars! What howling luck! Don't you see what it means, pard? *We're free*. Old Hagan's the prisoner now, and we've got our schooner back!"

. . . . . .

Now I know very well that this ought to be the end of my story. Virtue and (more or less) honest toil have received their just reward. Unfortunately, however, this

happens to be a true tale, and it seems necessary, therefore, to continue it to its bitter end. And, as the end, for the "Emblemites," was bitter indeed, I propose to cut the telling of it as short as I can.

Fate, in the shape of a British Lieutenant-Commander, ordained that we should take our schooner into Yap. Said that Lieutenant-Commander, "I'd say carry on for Macao and good-luck to you if you had *any* sort of Clearance to show. But you haven't, so only the Lord knows what you've been up to. I fear I'll have to send you in to Yap to let the shore people investigate. We've just handed the island over to the Japanese, but they'll attend to you nicely, I don't doubt. That ten thousand pounds' worth of shell you've got hold of will be a bit of a temptation to the land-sharks, I expect; but don't you worry. You can rely on *me* to see fair play. You see, I rather think you're subject to a Prize Court, and I'm a poor man. And some day I hope to have a large famiiy, so, if there's a chance of any loot, you'll understand I mustn't miss it. On second thoughts, I'll tow you inside myself and keep you under my eagle eye. If I leave you two roving round the high seas, you might get lost!"

As poor Jim says, there *are* too many laws nowadays. Far too many. Especially Japanese laws. They have a law which renders it obligatory to pay your ship-chandler four thousand odd Yen for seven hundred Yens' worth of stores obtained on credit. I do not pretend to understand the workings of this law. I merely state, baldly, how it works out in practice, and remark, in passing, that a Japanese lawyer can make "costs" and "interest" cover a vast amount of sin. The Japanese have another law which makes it necessary to undergo seven years' penal servitude if you run away with your own schooner after she has been "at-

tached." However, if you plead guilt and extenuating circumstances and a British Lieutenant-Commander speak up for you loudly enough, you may compound with the lawyers for Yen 10,000 instead of the seven years. Kidnapping a Japanese bailiff is also expensive. The price, for a bailiff of Hisatomi's size, is Yen 8000, plus "damages" amounting to Yen 2000 odd. Further, it is illegal for any vessel not under the Japanese flag to engage in trade between Japanese ports. Hakodate is, of course, Japanese; while Pelaup changed its status from German to Japanese while we were working for our living in Pelaup lagoon. Therefore this was another law we had shattered. The penalty was Yen 15,000. Lawyer's fees and costs appertaining to these matters amounted to Yen 800. On the other side of the account are these two items: Proceeds of forced sale of our £10,000 cargo—Yen 40,000; proceeds of forced sale of our schooner—Yen 7000.

If the reader is good at arithmetic and cares to audit the above figures, he will discover that, when the law had done with us, Jim and I were merely a couple of financial corpses picked exceedingly clean.

The disposal of the fragments that remained was as follows:—

4 bewildered Bonin Islanders shipped to Kobe as distressed seamen.
1 dejected Chinaman deported to Shanghai as an undesirable alien.
1 disgusted Japanese detained at Yap on suspicion as a deserting Reservist.
2 depressed Britons enlisted in the R.N.V.R.

"Well, Jim," said I as we fell in with the recruits on

board the receiving ship at Hongkong, "there's one comfort, at any rate. We can kill all the Germans we want to now without breaking any laws."

*"Germans!"* said Jim. "You can have all the Germans, mate. But, laws or no laws, there's going to be a nasty messy accident if I meet any Japs!"

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